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**CULTURE, SOLIDARITY  
AND  
THE IDEAL OF SUSTAINABILITY  
IN  
NORWEGIAN AND CHINESE  
TRADE UNIONS**

**A COMPARATIVE APPROACH**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Culture, Environment and Sustainability

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
Agenda 21	Action Plan for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century from the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992
AOF	Arbeidernes Opplysningsforbund i Norge
PRC	People's Republic of China
CCP	The Chinese Communist Party
CLB	Chinese Labour Bulletin
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon dioxide
CPPCC	The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference
EPI	Environmental Policy Integration
ETUC	The European Trade Union Confederation
FNI	Fritjof Nansen Institute
GNP	Gross National Product
GRIP	The Norwegian foundation for Sustainable Consumption and Production
HSE	Health, Safety and Environment (LO's terminology)
ICFTU	The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, now ITUC
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation, former ICFTU
IUCN	The International Union for the Conservation of Nature
IW	Inclusive Workplace
KMT	The Kuomintang Party
LO	Landsorganisasjonen i Norge, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and Landsorganisationen i Danmark, the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
LO in Oslo	The District member organisation of LO
MoE	Norwegian Ministry of the Environment
NCHR	The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPA	The Norwegian People's Aid
NPC	National People's Congress
NRC	Norwegian Research Council
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety (the ACFTU's terminology)

PRC	People's Republic of China
ProSuS	Program for Research and Documentation for a Sustainable Society
PULS	Fagbevegelsens miljøprosjekt i Groruddalen
RMB	Renminbi, China's currency, meaning Peoples' currency
SMTUC	Shanghai Municipal Trade Union Council
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
TSW	Towards the sustainable workplace (LO in Denmark)
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	The UN Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

## PREFACE

In my thesis I want to identify ways in which trade unions and shop stewards<sup>1</sup> understand and formulate aspects of environmental protection and sustainable development. My point of departure is that trade unions have and still could be important actors to change society in a more sustainable direction. My basic interest is grounded in the existing cooperation between *Landsorganisasjonen i Norge* (LO) and the *All-China Federation of Trade Unions* (ACFTU) and the trade union relationship between Oslo and Shanghai.

It was with humble feelings I started my study, particularly so in light of the subject on whom I have chosen to contrast: Norwegian and Chinese trade unions' culture and notions of sustainability. From the beginning, only a few individuals would admit that my objectives made any sense, and nobody thought my project would be easy. Despite the perceived obstacles, I was pleased to realise that fieldwork and relevant information in China was obtainable.

During my stay in Shanghai the autumn 2004, I was given unexpected support by the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, who put forward a four-point proposal on ways to advance win-win cooperation for sustainable development<sup>2</sup> (Xinhuanet, 2004.11.19). It was unproblematic for me to play down the presumed controversy related to my project. I was also given a boost by the speech the former president of LO, Gerd-Liv Valla, made on behalf of the Nordic trade unions movements, at the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) Congress, in which she promoted the necessity for constructive cooperation with the only permitted Chinese trade union. This is considered an extremely important contribution since the ICFTU has been enormously sceptical to the relationship LO has had with ACFTU. I used it as a door opener during my fieldwork.

I would like to stress that this study will not give a complete picture of trade union activities, but glimpses, in order to prove whether or not there is any correlation between the trade unions' stated policies and actions.

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term equivalent to the Norwegian *tillitsvalgt* meaning a person that is elected in the trade union board, in my case usually president, vice-president or secretary. Shop steward is commonly used in industry and union representative is more adequate for all sectors, but I am afraid this term could be misunderstood as a broader term of union representation. Elected officers mean fulltime work in the national union (AOF 1998). In Gyldendals ordbøker, Norsk - Engelsk *tillitsmann* is translated to shop steward (Gyldendal 1974). Shop stewards are vital in core activities such as administration, bargaining, recruitment and education and are expected to be workers' voice, and to negotiate with its counterpart on behalf of the workers. Ideally speaking they are the vanguards, watchdogs and combatants in the world of work.

<sup>2</sup> At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO Summit in Santiago, Chile, November 2004.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would never have been able to complete the study without the help and support of all my informants, and those who believed in the project and helped me to carry out my thesis.

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During my visits and studies in Shanghai, I found inspiration in my roommate Christina Roe Steen and the scholar Torstein Hjellum from the University of Bergen, to whom I am very grateful. I am also thankful to the Nordic Centre at Fudan University who granted me a scholarship and thus enabled me to complete my fieldwork in Shanghai.

I would not have been able to conduct my study without the assistance from my Chinese friends, Zhang Guo Feng and Liu Rui from International department at Shanghai Municipal Trade Union Council (SMTUC), who helped me with interpretation and establishing contact with Chinese workers. I also want to thank all the Chinese individuals who made my study possible and particularly, the leadership at the SMTUC.

A special thank to my nephew Kristoffer Husøy and niece Jessica Husøy, for their encouragement and help with proofreading during the whole period of my study. I also thank Chris Unwin who has helped me with proofreading throughout this thesis.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study describes the relationship between the culture of trade unions, solidarity and sustainable development. The major objective is to show how the culture of trade unions affects their perceptions of sustainable development. This has been done through a comparative, interdisciplinary study of LO in Norway and ACFTU in China.

The main finding is that although the nature and goal of trade unions and their culture of solidarity are well aligned with the ideal of sustainable development, evidence shows that little work is done in practice. It has been argued that trade unions have not been willing to carry the burden in order to change consumptions patterns or the mode of production. The reasons for this can be found in the culture of the trade unions. This is explained by constructs of nature basically as a source of work and income. By misreading the concept of solidarity with unbalanced emphasis on traditional values of securing employment, improving living conditions and wages, trade unions have ignored the importance of environmental aspects and sustainable development for the good of the workers. If trade unions continue to overlook their solidarity duties, workers will remain economically and environmentally victimised. To acknowledge the sustainable challenges, trade unions might have to return to their ideological roots as a social movement.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*We are not a market. We are people.*  
(David Ransom)

In this chapter I present background information on my topic, highlighting aspects of unionism and sustainability, such as the conflict between economic growth and sustainable development. Additionally, I introduce the agreement between the actors involved in my thesis. I also provide background information about the countries involved and bring along the context and interpretation of the concept of sustainability in Norway and China, in which trade unions operate. Subsequently, I introduce the scope of my study, limitations, and cross-cultural bias, and finally I outline the content of my thesis.

The Brundtland Report<sup>3</sup> *Our Common Future* from the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) is credited for its attention to and acceptance of the concept of sustainable development on the international political arena. *Our Common Future* underpins most contemporary environmental thinking and informs my further work.

The purpose of the study is to increase insight in and understanding of the notion of sustainability among shop stewards and bring into focus how trade unions deal with this issue. In order to do this, the culture of trade unions, structures, practises and priorities are explored. Due to the cultural approach, I place particular emphasis on nature perceptions in union symbols and discuss the findings related to the idea of solidarity.

## Trade unions and sustainability<sup>4</sup>

*The culture of solidarity is the driving power of unionism*  
(R. Lambert)

Today's industrial and modern society is full of paradoxes and contradictions related to the conflict between economic growth, the environment and sustainability. This tension is a central issue in trade union work. Major problems dating back to the advent of the industrial revolution such as more or less uncontrolled and unregulated capitalism, exploitation, societal class division and alienation are still relevant on the global stage. The major difference between the start of industrialisation and the present, is that most of contemporary society today has rather more experience with industrialisation, development and mass consumption, yet the flip side of the coin is evinced in increased environmental problems and a quest for sustainability in our society. However, trade unions play an important political and social role,

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<sup>3</sup> Named by the chair Gro Harlem Brundtland.

<sup>4</sup> The terms sustainable development and sustainability are used interchangeably in my thesis.

past and present, in both countries, and this study can contribute with relevant knowledge for trade union action in times to come.

Trade unions have been important institutions of the industrial society; they have helped deliver significant outcomes in terms of improved living standards, equity and justice to workers all over the world (Jose 2002, 1999:1<sup>5</sup>). Trade unions constitute an international movement that tends towards particular common values like freedom, equality and solidarity. International experiences demonstrate that trade unions are able to cooperate cross-culturally. Exchange of ideas between cultures and international cooperation between trade unions can contribute to sustainable practices as well. Due to the universality of trade unionism, my main assumption is that problems will be similar in many ways, despite the somewhat different cultures and political regimes. The nature of Norwegian trade unionism to a large extent resembles Western structures and practices. In China, the union is subordinated to the Communist party. The international umbrella organisation, The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, ICFTU<sup>6</sup>, where LO is a member, does not accept the ACFTU as a legitimate voice of Chinese workers, but encourage its affiliates to engage in critical dialogue (ICFTU 2004a). However, LO and the ACFTU carry out an ongoing collaboration. I assume that the ACFTU could function as the *worker's voice* in a society where freedom of speech and association are lacking.

Trade unions basically work for employment rights in the areas of wage bargaining, working conditions, and health and safety issues. Trade unions generally pursue economic growth in order to safeguard work places and taking care of the raising of salaries to increase material living conditions. On the other hand, their members may be victims of poor working conditions, hazardous work, and environmental pollution. In favourable circumstances, work contributes to good health and economic achievements and generally trade unions are most concerned about the environment of the workplace. The fact that the workplace is the setting in which many people spend a large proportion of their time and by that, unfortunately risk both their health and lives, explains this priority. The workplace environment exposes many workers to health hazards that contribute to injuries. Globally, 2.2 million people are killed at

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<sup>5</sup> A. V. Jose is an economist with specialisation in labour markets and managed the Programme on “Organized Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” at the ILO.

<sup>6</sup> After the World War II ended in 1945, the World Federation of Trade Unions was established by Russian, European, American unions and a few from other parts of the world. Anti-communism and the Cold War resulted in a split in 1949, partly driven as a reaction on the Russian critique of the US Marshall plan. The new US-dominant ICFTU played a role during the Cold War (Knut Kjeldstadli: 1979). This may be explains the scepticism to the ACFTU.

work per year, and 270 millions are injured in work accidents<sup>7</sup>. China counts for an increasingly large proportion of work-related diseases and occupational accidents, 90 500 deaths were recorded in 2001 (ILO: 2005, Demaret and Khalef 2004). The workplace environment should therefore be a field of more sustainable practices. Many workers live with their family in near proximity of polluting industry. Protecting workers at the workplace as well as the surrounding communities should therefore be of union interest. Healthy workplaces with pollution control will reduce emissions and contribute to sustainability. I therefore assume that workers have vital interests in decreasing pollution's effects on the environment and that trade unions can be arenas for pursuing societal change, including sustainable development.

Agenda 21<sup>8</sup> draws attention to trade unions, and aims to strengthen the role of workers and their trade unions. The Brundtland Report and the Rio Conference were events that resulted in a boost in engagement in a common environment. Agenda 21 says the efforts to implement sustainable development will involve adjustments and opportunities at the national and enterprise levels, with workers foremost among those concerned. As their representatives, it says, trade unions are vital actors in facilitating the achievement of sustainable development in view of their experience in addressing industrial change, the extremely high priority they give to protection of the working environment and the related natural environment, and their promotion of social responsibility and economic development (UN 1992, paragraph 29.1). Unfortunately, the potential has not been released. LO were previously more active in promoting sustainable practices, whereas today, it seems as the interest is rather low. Even at a political level, sustainable practises seem not to be given high priority.

Sustainability relies on the core connection between the local environment and the more global green issues and should be part of the trade union agenda. For the global trade union movement, a sustainable working environment should be, at least in principle, an important contribution to a sustainable development. This should also apply to the international solidarity work of trade unions, since they have the potential to be change agents

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<sup>7</sup> Work kills more than wars. These figures show us that six thousand dies every day, one death every fifteen seconds. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) deaths due to work-related accidents and illness represent 3.9 per cent of all deaths and 15 per cent of the world's population suffers a minor or major occupational accident or work related disease in any one year. While it is estimated that 2.2 per cent of death in industrialised countries are caused by workplace related accidents or illnesses, the figure in China is 2.8 per cent (ILO: 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Agenda 21- An Action Plan for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Agenda for Change in the condensed versions, adopted by 160 countries at the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The countries committed to compose national and local agendas.

in efforts to promote sustainable development. Trade union solidarity is under an obligation to capture more responsibility for sustainable development.

Different individuals and groups have different filters that influence their perceptions of the environment and their own role. The notion of environment will vary from individual to individual and the group you belong to. Trade union history and culture preserve certain values that can explain today's attitudes and perceptions to sustainable development. This is a dimension, which this study tries to address. I try to identify ways in which trade unions define and interpret the notion of sustainability, and how this is translated into action. The intention is that my thesis will reveal the extent to which there is a fit between stated political intent and corresponding action.

Before I started my work on this thesis, I knew little about the perceptions and the context of the environmental debate among Chinese trade unionists. I was more familiar with the Norwegian debate. That being said, I made the assumption that both Norwegian and Chinese trade unionists had the same goals for their lives: to enjoy a satisfactory livelihood while still ensuring the survival of future generations. It is my belief that exchange of views and ideas between cultures will enlighten challenges and opportunities in the attempt to incorporate sustainability. The inclusion of sustainable workplaces in collective bargaining could therefore be more than just a vision in the future.

### **The agreement between LO and the ACFTU**

Norway has several environmental projects in China, and emphasis is placed on environmental and natural resource management. Oslo and Shanghai municipalities signed a friendship agreement in 2001.

The relationship between LO and the ACFTU was resumed<sup>9</sup> in 1995 and a Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1996. From LO's perspective, dialogue and collaboration was stressed instead of isolation and confrontation. The collaboration is explained through solidarity and mutual interest, since trade union movements of both countries face the similar challenges in an increasingly globalised world. An underlying motive is to balance the power of capital and multinational companies. Peace and development, the boosting of respect for trade union rights all over the world, and an exchange of experiences are also cited (LO 1997a).

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<sup>9</sup> The first contact was taken in 1989 during the UN's Women Conference in Beijing.

The partners have carried out the following measures to achieve this: the exchange of information materials, the exchange of experts, and the exchange of delegations for extended periods to increase the level of knowledge about conditions in each other's country. Cooperation in order to analyse and survey the trade union work situation in foreign-owned companies, including the Norwegian-owned enterprises in China, was also part of the agreement. Globalisation, working conditions, labour legislation, negotiations and collective agreements, the rights of trade unions' representatives and the shop stewards role in enterprise democracy, gender equality, pension systems, labour market and tripartite cooperation have all been among the themes of the collaboration. LO participates in state-to-state roundtable discussions on human rights as well. Additionally, there is bilateral collaboration between national and local trade unions (LO: 2002a).

The agreement opens up for taking up the issue of sustainable development, even though the topic has yet to be prioritised. It is a paradox that environment protection and efforts towards more sustainability are not included in the cooperation – in particular since LO has experience and knowledge in these fields that the ACFTU does not have.

## **China versus Norway**

*The revolution is over.*  
(Michel Oksenberg)

The modern era has often been characterized by a belief in progress as the crux of the process of modernisation. Both countries promote economic growth and technological optimism. History and culture are important in order to understand the present situation. China's history is in many aspects a spectacular story. The Chinese people have been through dramatic changes and experiences during the last hundred years: from semi-feudalism to semi-colonial rule to foreign occupation and to a socialist revolution, including The Great Leap forward, the Cultural Revolution and transition to a market economy. According to Oksenberg<sup>10</sup> (2001:30), the Chinese leaders have proclaimed an end to class struggle, the state is abandoning its command economy, and the pursuit of socialism has yielded way to the pursuit of economic growth.

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Oksenberg was a leading China scholar and a well-reputed analyst of the Chinese political system and contributed heavily to the field of modern China studies.

China has become a major actor in the global world of business. Foreign investors are flocking to China due to its cheap labour. Yet the realisation of a *socialist* market economy<sup>11</sup> has worldwide environmental and economic consequences. The economic policy of the reforms since 1978, with their emphasis on industrialisation, modernisation and rapid economic growth, has led to an intolerable pressure on natural resources and severe environmental problems, such as deforestation, desertification and heavy urban pollution (Nielsen<sup>12</sup> 2003:2). Judith Shapiro<sup>13</sup> challenges the view that the problems are attributable solely to post-Mao economic reforms and industrial growth and points out Mao's massive nature-control experiments - what she called "Mao's war against nature" (2001:1).

The economic growth in China has increased incomes, reduced poverty, and improved health. However, the same unbridled growth that has lifted millions out of poverty has also damaged the environment. A strong foundation and strict implementation of Chinese environmental policy are important. In this matter the ACFTU could play a role.

Norway is a relatively young nation with a small population, but it has a rich and well-developed economy. Since World War II, Norwegian society has been characterised by stability and economic growth. Norway is regarded as a post-industrial society<sup>14</sup>, while China is as yet largely a developing country. Norway is an industrialised and modern consumer society and the economy is a prosperous bastion of welfare capitalism, featuring a combination of free market activities and government intervention. The Working Environment Act has been immensely important in Norwegian working life since 1977. This resulted in an institutionalised world of work with strong regulations and control. These experiences could be useful to the ACFTU.

Norway is highly dependent on oil production; discovery of oil and gas in the late 1960s hugely boosted economic prosperity. However, since environmental protection in

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<sup>11</sup> It is rather difficult to place China's current political system. According to Oksenberg (2001), previous depictions as "totalitarianism", "a Leninist party state" "soft" or "fragmented authoritarianism" or bureaucratic pluralism" miss the complexity of China's state structure today. Having this in mind, I use such terms in lack of fair and re-defined concepts. What is beyond dispute is the dominance of state bureaucracy. The Chinese themselves use socialism – thus with Chinese characteristics, a power language adapting the saying that the pen is mightier than the sword – due to the fact that I have not got any adequate explanation of what the term actually means, neither socialism within a regime with increasing marketisation and capitalism, nor the Chinese characteristics. It might be related to former leader Deng Xiaoping, the architect behind the economic transformation that said it does not matter if the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice.

<sup>12</sup> Stine Lykke Nielsen, East Asian Department, University of Aarhus, in a paper for the Nordic Conference of China Studies, University of Oslo June 2003, based on her thesis.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Shapiro is an environmental politics professor at American University in Washington.

<sup>14</sup> This is regarded as a set of development rather than a specific period of time, largely coincided with the postwar-period (Kaelble 1985:131).



Norway has largely focused on conserving nature and trans-boundary pollution, it is still affected by poor environmental practices in certain sectors such as oil industry and transportation.

China has all the components of a typical developmental dilemma characterised by diminishing natural resources, serious environmental pollution, rapid economic growth and an increasing income gap between the eastern and western parts of the country (Heggelund<sup>15</sup> 2003:2). Ma and Ortolano<sup>16</sup> state that spectacular economic growth and rapid development, the increase in population, and industrialisation and urbanisation are causes of China's environmental difficulties. The rise of these, bringing with it expanded transportation networks, has been accompanied by cutbacks in land under cultivation and has caused notable decreases in farmland (2000:1-2).

On the other hand, Norway's democratic political organisation of capitalism and social democracy differs from the combination of capitalism and one-party communism or state socialism present in China. There has never been democracy in China, yet some degree of local autonomy has been permitted. Nielsen argues that the environment is a central issue in Chinese politics today, with environmental protection one of the areas where a relatively open public debate is possible and where scientists and intellectuals are encouraged to engage in the discussion. The green NGOs mainly work in the field of environmental education and conservation while in other countries, like Norway, they are engaged in environmental management and supervision as well, meaning that they also have a watchdog function (Heggelund 2003:16). Notwithstanding, according to Ma and Ortolano, the limited access to information and other restrictions faced by NGOs, they have done much to protect the environment during the past few years, mainly by raising public awareness of environmental problems, carrying out campaigns to change behaviour and conducting studies of environmental issues aimed at influencing national leaders (2000). Observers believe the civil realm will increase in numbers and importance in the future because of higher public awareness and more activities in policy advocacy (Zhuang 2004<sup>17</sup>, Lee 2003).

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<sup>15</sup> Gørild Heggelund, Senior Research Fellow at Fritjof Nansen Institute (FNI), Lysaker.

<sup>16</sup> Xiaoying Ma is an environmental specialist with the Asian Development Bank in Manila and Leonard Ortolano is professor of Civil Engineering at Stanford University.

<sup>17</sup> Lecture and paper handed out by A. Zhuang in a seminar at Fudan University, Shanghai, China.

## **Sustainable development in Norway and China**

Trade unions' policies and activities reflect the society and actual policies in the country. Therefore, I introduce some critiques on what the two countries have done in order to work towards sustainable development.

Norway is richly endowed with natural resources such as petroleum, hydropower, fish and forests, but environmental degradation is connected to all of them. Current causes of environmental degradation are water pollution including acid rain, which damages forests, adversely affects lakes and threatens fish stocks, and air pollution from vehicle emissions. The Norwegian Government endorsed the main viewpoints in *Our Common Future* and sustainable development was declared as the overriding objective for the Government's future policy from late 1980s. Economic development, full employment and a good environment were the 'corner-stones' of the government's policy to further develop and improve the welfare society (MoE 1988-89:8). After this introductory phase, the main characteristic of Norwegian policy on sustainable development is that there has been no national strategic plan, partly due to conflicts between ministries and how the term should be understood. But the efforts and investments made to *institutionalise* sustainable development in Norway have no doubt led to substantial progress in selected areas such as waste management, pollution control, conservation, environmental law, and planning (Langhelle 2000: 7 and 38, chapter VI).

Bugge argues that the broad understanding of sustainable development had a short life in Norwegian politics after 1987. Bugge points out that the policy was in reality narrowed down to environmental policy only. Ministries such as the Oil and Energy, Trade and Industry, Transport, and Finance ministries have never shown particular interest. Defining sustainable development as a new name for environmental protection and not attacking the root causes is exactly what the Brundtland Report warned strongly against doing. Bugge indicates that the oil and gas sector is to blame (2002:xviii and xixx). Hovden and Torjussen focus on the implementation of Environmental Policy Integration (EPI), and state that the implementation of initiatives has been slow and piecemeal, and the ambition of Agenda 21 to harmonise the various sectoral economic, social and environmental policies and plans has been broadly neglected (2002:37).

China is rich in natural resources, such as coal, petroleum, natural gas, and has a large potential for hydropower. The major environmental problems are air pollution, greenhouse

gases from reliance on coal producing acid rain, water shortage in particular in the North, water pollution from untreated waste, deforestation, and trade in endangered species. Chinese interpretation of sustainable development is generally rather loosely defined. Nielsen concludes that in some respects the Chinese Agenda 21 is a reflection of the views and objectives of the international version, but the content of the concept of “environmental protection with Chinese characteristics” has been completely adjusted to the Chinese political and economic agenda. The focus is solely on development in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) growth rate, and the vision of development is dominated by the perception of development equalling economic growth. Nevertheless, she states, some aspects of the text indicates that changes are taking place, albeit slowly, and that the government to some extent has been influenced by international discourse (2003:6-9). According to Heggelund, the UN global environmental conferences for China in terms of domestic environmental policymaking have been crucial, despite the fact that China’s domestic environmental problems have become a growing impetus for environmental action by the leadership (2003: 1-2).

As we see, none of the countries are in the forefront in order to carry out sustainable development. Despite good intentions, the national political agenda seems to be most important in both countries.

### **The scope of the study**

The study is an *asymmetrical* interdisciplinary study with a comparative approach in the case of the two trade unions, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) in Norway and All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) in China. With *asymmetrical*, I indicate that all variables are not comparable and in some cases I have placed emphasis on Chinese (political) culture rather than on the culture of trade unions. The rationale behind my topic is that awareness and understanding of trade union culture and their actions could be crucial in the efforts to advance sustainable development in the future. Due to the disparities between the two trade unions, I have searched for similarities (Green 2004:42-47).

The major approach is to establish how the concepts of environment and sustainable development are understood, interpreted and presented; what perceptions and perspectives are expressed; and how the politically formulated aims are followed up in political practice? The study is twofold: (i) what do the local union representatives articulate, and (ii) what do the organisations communicate? The underlying questions for my thesis are whether the

cooperation between LO and ACFTU is or can be a contribution to sustainable development, and how this can be identified. More specifically, several questions and varying angles will guide me to the core of my thesis:

1. How is sustainability formulated in trade unions' political aims?
2. How are the ideal aims realised?
3. What are the attitudes, beliefs, opinions and environmental behaviour among shop stewards?
4. How are environmental protection and sustainable development understood by shop stewards and the trade unions?
5. How do trade unionists think about economic growth versus sustainable development?
6. Does any potential exist for trade unions to advance sustainable practises and activities?

Cultural analysis must be done in relation of the social structure and its historical contingency, or, as Raymond Williams puts it: History and culture are not separate entities (1996:169). Therefore, I have briefly reviewed union related history in both societies in my thesis. The major differences between the two nations are related to history, culture, the developmental phase of the two countries, and the political regime, lacking democracy and transparency in China.

Because the ACFTU role in Chinese society is an unknown landscape in Norway, I have given attention to the description of the Chinese situation and the ACFTU in particular. I do, however, also present Norwegian unionism for the benefit of a foreign readership, for example in China.

The limitation of the study is accounted for in each chapter as the thesis proceeds.

### **The risk of cross-cultural bias**

In order to interpret Chinese trade union culture, it was important to me to grasp some idea about general perceptions of China. Dealing with China is dealing with "a set of many Chinas" (Blum and Jensen, c2002: xvii). Dealing with China is also dealing with the popular Western imagination of "the Middle Kingdom" which for centuries has been a symbol of centeredness. According to Blum and Jensen, Westerners have assumed that the docile

Chinese population inevitably follows the dictates of central authority or, failing that, of tradition (ibid. p.1). This is not necessarily an accurate picture. Blum and Jensen remind us of the intercultural challenges we face, and that we got our perceptions and stereotypes mostly from Chinese urban intellectuals. On the other hand, Harald Bøckman states that the old idea of the central power's decisive importance still is taken for granted by most of the Chinese population (1995:11). In a political sense, Western people tend to believe that modern Chinese citizens will increasingly be like Westerners. Bøckman is not sharing this belief. He reminds us of the peculiar Chinese political culture and its continued effect on the political structure and mindsets, and he therefore concludes that new patterns are likely to surface (ibid. p. 77). I will in the following be careful to attribute my own perceptions of the Chinese.

Because I have carried out my own work with interviews, the effects of stereotypical perceptions and cultural blindness may have decisive impact on one's work. In the case of China, it is easy to be blinkered while trying to gain a deeper understanding of the Chinese worldview and self-image, due to the impact of one's own ethnocentric baggage. My first step was to rethink my perceptions and stereotypes about Chinese society, which probably are manifold. Such a cultural baggage will definitively influence one's research. I have had to examine this part of Chinese society through Western glasses.

### **Outline of the content**

Chapter two introduces the methodology used, while Chapter three gives an introduction to the main theoretical perspectives used in this study. Chapter four describes the actors, their working principles and their national and historical context. Chapter five summarises the empirical findings with some brief interpretations and discussion, while the main discussion on trade union and their culture is presented in Chapter six and seven. Finally, the conclusions are presented in Chapter eight.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose in this chapter is to account for how I conducted the study and explain choices I made and problems I met. This chapter sets out the theoretical backdrops for the comparison and the methodological approach and the fieldwork.

In general there is a need for comparative knowledge on and understanding of development problems in different countries, and in particular with regard to developing countries like China with vast problems related to the environment, social insecurity and insufficient administration. Important lessons can be learned when displaying various aspects of the Chinese society in light of experiences from developed countries. Experiences with strict environmental regulations and supervision on the shop floor level in Norway may well be useful for the Chinese trade unions. On the contrary, understanding of Chinese ways of thinking might enlighten unions in Norway and other parts of the world. The universality of the nature of trade union related to national industrial hierarchies and local bodies offers a sphere of culture appropriate to my comparison. My study entails important applied research perspectives on how to advance sustainability in trade unions and therefore LO and the ACFTU are a relevant field of study.

Due to the examination of a relatively virgin field and the complex nature of my research, I draw on interdisciplinary research. The interdisciplinary approach provides extra angles that are important when undertaking research on development and environment. In studying the environment, it is necessary to draw upon natural sciences. An adequate understanding of the interplay between humans and their natural environment requires insight from the social sciences and last, but not least, humanistic disciplines (McNeill et al. 2001: 5, 8). In order to understand better the culture of trade unions, I draw upon disciplines like history and ethnology.

When dealing with perceptions, a qualitative method will be appropriate on the basis that the focus is on the experiences, interpretations, impressions or motivations of an individual or individuals, and seeks to describes how people view things and why. It relates to beliefs, attitudes and changing behaviour<sup>18</sup>. An important aspect of qualitative research is that it reflects the reality of a small quantity of people allowing analysis of that part of reality at a deeper level by letting the researcher come closer to the informants and the information. To obtain a broader insight into the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, I considered semi-structured interviews to be the appropriate method of examination (Hellevik 1977). Semi-structured

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<sup>18</sup> [www.cirem.org.uk/definitions.html](http://www.cirem.org.uk/definitions.html)

means there are no fixed questions and no particular sequence, but the interviewer improvises to let the conversation cover certain topics.

When entering the field, my head was filled with many questions: Would the Chinese and the Norwegians understand my questions in the same way? Will they be honest? Would the answers be at all possible to compare? I had tried my best to prepare thoroughly to reduce the pitfalls. As an active LO member in Oslo and having been involved in the international collaboration with Shanghai, I have endeavoured to be critical of my own role.

### **The comparative method**

There is no easy entry into comparative research. Since my research project was unlikely to be quantitative and representative, but qualitative in approach, I found it easier and felt freer to carry out the interpretation of similarities and differences in the countries compared. Else Øyen points out that the trend of globalisation has changed our cognitive map. With references to Sztompka, she demonstrates that comparative research may have to shift its emphasis from seeking uniformity among variety to studying the preservation of enclaves of uniqueness among growing homogeneity and uniformity (1990:1). Not least, this is relevant for the globalisation of environmental problems and the notion of sustainability, but also related to the history and culture of trade unions.

The workforces are globally becoming increasingly more diverse, but waged workers are first and foremost selling labour power. Noel Castree identified some deep-seated social and geographical similarities: The reproduction is the daily process of feeding, clothing, sheltering and socialising people (2004:5-6). To be employed or unemployed, or having poor working conditions, or live in a polluted environment, would be experienced in the same way in the two countries, yet the economic and social conditions are worse in China. Therefore, it is my belief that my study of two contrasting cultures will make sense.

The aim of cross-national research is to reduce unexplained variance and find patterns and relationships (Øyen 1990:3). My attempt will be to find comparative patterns. To compare wholly identical phenomena would have been of little interest, and to compare totally dissimilar ones would have made little sense (Etzioni-Halevy 1990:116). The political and cultural contexts of the target groups of my study differ, but not totally and therefore the comparison makes sense. The range of targets lies between requiring the study of political structures with a broad common denominator, which contrasts could be highlighted and differentiating factors could be singled out (*ibid*). In the present study the common

denominator is the culture of trade unions. However, I have to bear in mind that China is an authoritarian one-party state with a strong state bureaucracy, in contrast to pluralism and democracy in Norway.

What I would like to stress are the following aspects related to my comparison: Both unions have evolved on the same basis: A unifying idea built on solidarity, but evolved in different directions: The ACFTU is commonly described as a communist party-state transmission belt and part of the state apparatus, subordinated the Communist party (Clarke: 2005). LO belongs to the strong North-European unions (Kjeldstadli: 1979). This is detailed described in the following chapters. In order to detach the ideal from the real, the interpretation has been a dilemma, though this is not only related to the Chinese doctrines and rhetoric. On the other hand the ACFTU is changing and endeavour to conduct their work on equal footing vis-à-vis the Government at the same time being subordinated. They also attempt to adopt Western unionisms, though on their own premises. These antagonisms and processes in China are of great importance to study, particularly related to typologies of unionism. Moreover, the field of environmental protection and sustainable development is also increasingly opening up in China, as described in the previous chapter.

Regarded to the comparison of countries, Teune underlines the importance of being confident that the components compared are the same or indicate something equivalent (Teune 1990:54). This is in accordance with my argument above. My study is an *asymmetrical* comparison due to the fact that all components compared are not the same, but indicate equivalences, for example related to ACFTU's environmental policy and nature representations. Other factors differ in terms of such as the extent of economic and social development and democracy. Related to the enquiry, Shanghai is more appropriate to Oslo than other communities in China.

To sum up, despite the countries compared are dissimilar, the conclusion is that I find the comparison feasible. The similarities will be identified and contrasts highlighted, as well as attitudes and behaviour among the target group.

## **Fieldwork and data collection**

Literature on my thesis topic is hard to come by, with the consequence that fieldwork was required. I use the term in its broad definition of different forms of data collection and the relations involved. The data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The major source of primary data is derived from semi-structured interviews among shop stewards



and interviews with key informants in Oslo and Shanghai. The same questionnaire was directed to all. The purpose of the interviews is to receive a deeper understanding of the notion of sustainability among trade unionists. The written primary sources comprise different kinds of texts; Programme of action, reports, booklets, magazines and speeches from LO and ACFTU. In addition to literature on the topic, the secondary data is based on Internet sources, newspapers, official documents, research publications including doctoral dissertations, master's thesis and articles containing theories and empirical evidence on Chinese and Norwegian environmental policy, sustainable development and trade unionism. In this phase it has also been crucial for me to read other reports on fieldwork in China.

In addition to my supervisors, I had dialogues with the following researchers and specialists on China and trade unionism in the preparatory phase of my work: Gørild Heggelund from the Fritjof Nansen Institute (FNI) Lisa Stearns from the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights (NCHR), Liv Tørres from the Norwegian Research Council (NRC), Diis Bøhn, Halvor Wøien, Chen Wei and Karin Beate Theodorsen from LO, Guo Feng Zhang, Liu Rui from SMCTU and Chengfu Zhang from ACFTU. The fieldwork in China was normative for the selection of comparable informants and written material in Norway. Both the interview guide and list of informants are reported in the appendices.

My stay in China in June 2004, joining a trade union delegation invited by the ACFTU in Shanghai, was also important because it gave me the opportunity to do some preliminary work on my study. To supplement my knowledge on China, I took a Master course on "Chinese politics" at the Nordic Center, Fudan University in Shanghai, during the autumn 2004. A scholarship from the same institution gave me the opportunity to follow up the fieldwork during the spring 2005. During spring 2005, I also completed a Master's course on "East Asia at work" at the Department of Cultural and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo. These studies provided unique insight into Chinese society, though they limited the time I had at my disposal for the writing of this thesis.

My idea was to gain a grasp of attitudes, beliefs and opinions at the shop floor level, something that was most realistic in that I had the best contact network in Shanghai. As I was a part of the cooperation between trade unions in Oslo and Shanghai, I was fortunate enough to be in the position to carry out my work successfully. However, my experience from Chinese trade unionism demonstrated that social rank plays an important role in getting in touch with people.

## **Informants**

The data collection was based largely on work carried out from shop stewards in trade unions at shop floor level. I had no intention of carrying out a representative study among shop stewards or workers in general: the sample was too small for this. ACFTU is strongest in state-owned companies and public administration and this fact reflects the selection of the target group. My criteria for the informants were to obtain a selection of shop stewards in different types of workplaces, different kinds of company ownership, to have both sexes represented, and to have a variety of ages and education. Another criterion was that traditional industry and two districts<sup>19</sup> in Shanghai should be represented. Nevertheless the final selection of informants was dominated by state-owned enterprises.

In Oslo I tried to make the selection comparable, drawing on different branches bearing in mind the disparities in industry and ownership. The sample also had to be approximately representative. I used my knowledge of trade unions and my network in LO in Oslo to select informants in accordance with this. The sample for the semi-structured interviews represents 7 males and 6 females from the ages of 28 to 59 in Shanghai, and 6 males and 5 females from the ages of 29 to 61 in Oslo.

A second group of informants comprised representatives from the elected board and officials from SMTUC in Shanghai and LO in Oslo, and I also used a third group of well-informed people - mainly to give me background information. I used personal networks and the snowballing approach to guide me to key individuals.

Making use of my trade union network has been decisive in being able to reach my target group. All informants agreed to be interviewed. The majority of my informants said that they were glad to be asked and appreciated being able to talk about the topics.

## **Examination of written material**

The written material is confined to Chinese texts in English corresponding to that which is available from LO. The two confederations have different ways of disseminating information and debates. To examine LO's stated policies, its 2001-2004 programme of action was appropriate (LO 2001a). To examine the ACFTU, I used the report delivered by the President, Wang Zhaoguo, at the National Congress of Chinese Trade Unions in 2003 (Wang 2003). The

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<sup>19</sup> I owe the reader a clarification on the distinction between Shanghai as a metropolis direct under the Central Government, a municipality of the PRC that has a province level status and Oslo as a city municipality with county status. Though there is no substantial distinction, the use of the term 'district' can confuse. The district of Oslo is not comparable to districts in Shanghai, which are subordinated to the provincial level.

Blue Paper on Chinese trade unions' safeguarding of the legitimate rights and interests of workers and staff members (ACFTU 2002) and a speech on the protection of occupational safety and health given by Zhang Chengfu, Director of the Labour Protection Department in the ACFTU was important in being able to analyse how they promote the work on the subject and follow up political decisions. Norwegian texts on the same subject were easy to come by, since in Norway the Representative Meeting scrutinises LO's daily work through annual reports.

Since LO's programme concerns most fields of society, and since economic, social and environmental perspectives are integrated in several fields of policy, I had to ensure that my selection indicated what was done in selected fields. Because the ACFTU is both a trade union and part of the state apparatus, and due to the poor situation for many workers, a major part of their activities go far beyond core trade union obligations. It would nevertheless be unfair not to view the breadth of their repertoire in my examination.

From ACFTU, I scrutinised three editions of the English-speaking magazine *Chinese Trade Unions*<sup>20</sup>, and commensurate editions of *LO-Aktuelt*. One of the Chinese magazines reported from The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference<sup>21</sup> (CPPCC), known as a consultative body mainly of non-party people, and I have devoted some space to this due to the fact that it was fairly informative about ACFTU's work and views.

I would like to point out that neither environmental matters, except the working environment, nor sustainable development are obviously referred to in any of the magazines. In this examination it was rather more difficult to make a proper selection than the previously examined documents, because they lay in the grey zone with regard to my criteria. Therefore I had to interpret stories appropriate to my purpose. The criteria I set were that those I examined should be sustainability-relevant stories either about the environment and solidarity work, or Health Safety and Environment (HSE) commonly used in Norway and Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in the Chinese context. However, the Chinese magazines offered several photos that displayed perceptions of nature. In order to examine symbols of nature representation in trade union culture, I searched for songs and posters randomly in union songbook and at the Internet for Chinese examples.

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<sup>20</sup> I am not sure whether it is directed for foreign readers rather than its own members.

<sup>21</sup> This conference is a forum for discussing major policies concerning economic, cultural and social affairs before the decisions are made of central and local government.

By using these documents, I was able to make the examination roughly compatible. These documents make it possible to analyse how the two confederations follow up their stated policies.

### **Methodological considerations**

The difference in language, culture and politics in the countries studied is obvious. My mission was not easy. The most serious shortcoming is that, to this very day, I have still not found any research on the fundamental components of my study: trade unions and the notion of sustainability from the combined perspective of China and Norway.

A significant shortcoming was the language. The interviews in Shanghai were conducted in English, and when speaking a foreign language, there is almost always a limitation in expression, depending on one's knowledge of the language. Nuances often disappear in such a form of communication, something that was even the situation when I used an interpreter. A well-informed Chinese interpreter who was exhaustively introduced to my project was the best choice in my attempts to minimise cultural bias. These limitations probably affected the interviews, although to what extent is difficult to tell.

I was confronted with only one main problem during the fieldwork in Shanghai. For practical reasons I had to interview the informants in groups. This was explained by the fact that it was not easy for workers to be given time off from their job to meet me for interviews. I chose to cut out some questions to some of the informants. This was the case with questions about trade unions. I quickly realised that the Chinese informants did not respond to these questions in an adequate way, and so I considered it as relatively easy to drop them, particularly as they had been addressed to the other group of informants. Time imbalance between interviews was of course unavoidable when the interviews lasted for about two hours, no matter how many informants were present in Shanghai. However, I am convinced that it did not undermine the final result, and despite the problems, I was able to have most of my research questions answered.

It has been fairly difficult to examine the ACFTU's stated policy on sustainable development. The reason is obvious: the examined material does not use such terms as *sustainability*, nor does it contain any explicit reference to environmental policy at all. This does not prove that their policy and activities are not moving in a more sustainable direction, which I return to in my discussion below. However, according to an ACFTU official,

sustainable development is defined as a political issue<sup>22</sup>, which might explain why ACFTU has little written material on the subject. I was also told that the term *scientific development*, which regularly figures in Chinese trade union records, was synonymous with sustainable development. I find it reasonable to accept this as an explanation for the lacking use of sustainability.

One methodological challenge was related to finding comparable written materials. When examining texts, one will not always find adequate texts on the topic, sometimes not even produced for the same purposes. Nonetheless, I found the Chinese Blue paper and report speech at the ACFTU's 2003 Congress comparable with LO's annual reports. Finally, in relation to pamphlets and banners, and songs and posters in my collection, the examination of union symbols is relatively limited. On the contrary, the Chinese authorities regularly use illustrations in their political campaigns.

Trade union practices vary in the countries compared. You cannot easily use blueprints to compare Chinese and Norwegian unionism or labour relations. Today's concept of collective negotiation has only recently been introduced in China, and many of the trade unionists are not yet familiar to it.

In the preliminary phase I planned to interview bureaucrats from the district and provincial authorities working on Environmental Protection about their opinions and assumptions on the trade unions' role, their potential as parts of the environmental movement and the possibilities for alliances. I also aimed to gain the views from representatives of Green NGO's on the same issue. However, after interviews in Shanghai, I concluded that this was a largely meaningless exercise because the informants had no particular view at all on the matter.

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<sup>22</sup>An official from ACFTU told me in Beijing 2004.06.24.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, I provide an overview of central literature and definitions on the major approaches in my thesis. The study is primarily based on literature on sustainability and trade unions. Perceptions of nature and the conception of sustainable development are strongly linked, which explain why this is also included. The nature of trade unions and Western typology are introduced. In authoritarian regimes unions are often seen as part of the state rather than separate and autonomous. Therefore the concept of transmission belts is briefly described. The relationship of trade unions to the state, commonly described as pluralism and corporatism, is important, and, is examined in this part as well. The cultural approach required literature on union history and labour culture, and ultimately I focus on the solidarity approach. The more specific theories and concepts employed are introduced in each chapter.

#### **Sustainable development**

Since trade unions usually pursue economic growth in order to generate jobs and workplaces for their member, the present work uses interpretations from the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future*, which defines sustainable development as development that meets: “the needs and aspiration of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future” (WCED, 1987:40).

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) introduced the concept *sustainable human development* (UNDP 1994:19). Merle L. Jacob<sup>23</sup> states that this concept was supposed to be more inclusive and less ambiguous than that of sustainable development by placing people at the centre of development (1996:17-19). The most fundamental dimension is the environmental or ecological, which includes nature conservation, environmental protection and ecological balance. The economic dimension is related to eco-efficiency and sustainable consumption and the social is related to equity for current generations and national equity between current and future generations (Lafferty 2002).

Jacob, points out the fact that the acceptance of sustainability in the policy discourse in part depends on it being packaged as a concept that could effect a merger between environmental preservation and economic development. The premise of indivisibility became important in the Brundtland Report, which expanded its scope by placing elements of the debate on sustainability within the economic and political context of international development. According to Jacob, this expansion depended on a construction that asserted

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<sup>23</sup> Merle L. Jacob, in her doctor's degree at Gothenburg University, Department of Theory of Science and Research.

environment's indivisibility from development. Jacob considers sustainability to be a "bridging principle between environment and development". She also points out that sustainable development is not a monolithic perspective (1996:12-17).

To illustrate the core idea, Hans Chr. Bugge<sup>24</sup> quotes Brundtland's own formulations: "Sustainable development does not imply absolute limits to growth and it is not a new name for environmental protection; it is a new concept of economic growth" (Bugge 2002:xvii). As we have already seen in the introduction chapter, Norway and China interpret ways of sustainable development in accordance with national policy and not necessarily in terms of advancing sustainability, yet environmental protection is focused on. This is a weakness when one tries to measure actual policy. Therefore it is important to bear certain critical ideas in mind when exploring the matter.

Michael Redclift's core point is that the concept of sustainable development is founded upon a contradiction. He states that the environmental issues are socially constructed under capitalism because little consideration has been given to the impact of capitalist development on the environment. He contends that ever since its introduction in the 1970s, the term has become the trademark of international organisations dedicated to achieving environmentally benign or beneficial development, and that the term suggests that the lessons of ecology can, and should, be applied to economic processes. Redclift concludes that sustainable development comprises more than seeking a compromise between the natural environment and the pursuit of economic growth (1987:11-12, 204). Redclift objects to the fact that the common definition of sustainability does not challenge the economic order of capitalism or communism directly. If it did, it would be too controversial. The point must have been not to provoke too much resistance among the economic elites, China included, but rather urge a change step by step.

Another critique is put forward by W. M. Adams, who questions the Brundtland Report because it defines sustainable development in terms of the achievement of certain social and economic objectives rather than in terms of some notional measurement of the *health* of the environment (1990:59)<sup>25</sup>. I have sympathy with his objections, though I simultaneously found a broad definition realistic in terms of focusing on changing development in a more sustainable direction. As Adams points out: "Sustainable development

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<sup>24</sup> Hans Chr. Bugge is Professor of Environmental Law, served as State Secretary and was a Personal Advisor to Gro Harlem Brundtland in her work as Chair of the World Commission.

<sup>25</sup> A 2001 edition is online on Ebrary, which is not available for students at the University of Oslo.

is the beginning of a process, not the end” (ibid. p. 202). There is no doubt that the Brundtland Report’s definition is a compromise, but if the Commission did not agree, one might argue that the global pressure for sustainability we have today, might had been weaker. Rather than an excuse for doing nothing, I believe the intention was to gather support to do *something*.

Lafferty<sup>26</sup> and Langhelle stress the relevance of a broad conception of sustainability and contend the concept is on a par with other high-minded terms such as democracy, freedom, and human rights. Furthermore, the authors add the “openness of meaning” of these concepts can never be closed because the content of sustainable development is not fixed once and for all. The benefit of such a broad conception, they argue, is linked to the continued political discourse on the concept’s content and future goals (1999:26). The scientific knowledge develops while the environmental awareness increases, and nobody has one specific truth regarding sustainable development. It is more an idea and principle direction of progress. In order to achieve sustainable economic development, new, but sustainable growth is required.

It may be countered that growth itself cannot be sustainable. Such a view, which affects, as it does, the entire economic system, would not gain support, but resistance. It would also most probably be considered unrealistic. In the view of the South, in particular, trade with the North is important for development. Not least, this is also the trade union view (LO 2001a, Wang 2003). One might argue that a new concept of economic growth, including social, economical and environmental dimensions constitute the ideal notion of sustainable development that aims to be more in harmony with the ecosystem.

Langhelle stresses that the relationship between sustainable development and economic growth is not the entire message in the Brundtland Report. He adds that there is a basic concept and broad strategic framework and interprets the concept such as physical sustainability, generational justice and global solidarity simultaneously must be taken into account. He stresses that sustainable development provides conceptual tools for the task and stipulates a global partnership in which the pressing North-South disparities and agendas might be overcome (2000:133,147). Langhelle’s approach is useful to my thesis because global solidarity is a fundamental idea in international unionism, unfortunately not yet given any breakthrough in sustainable issues. Nonetheless, such an ideal approach provides the opportunity to confront trade unions with sustainability as an ideological duty.

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<sup>26</sup> William Lafferty is Professor of Political Science and Director at ProSus.



The rather broad definition of sustainability has come to dominate public discourse. The substance of sustainability includes *environmental, economic and social dimensions*. Since trade unions enjoy being influential societal actors that pursue a highly political agenda, the trade union's notion of sustainability should include all these aspects. Sustainability also calls for solidarity with the poor and future generations. My rather wide approach, but ideal definition of sustainability, can be justified because it is in accord with the Brundtland Report. Additionally, it has been useful because trade unions employ a wide approach.

### **Perceptions and the construct of nature**

An examination of perceptions of nature is one approach that gives insight into culture and tradition, and explains present values and attitudes. Raymond Williams alleged nature to be “perhaps the most complex word in the [English] language” and stated, “Any full history of the uses of nature [he warned] would be a history of a large part of human thought” (cited in Coates 1998:1). In her comprehensive work on cultural constructions of the environment, I. G. Simmons argues that man's capacity is too limited to comprehend the real cosmos and its true nature and therefore, in order to understand, we make constructions (1993:3). Consequently, attitudes towards sustainability and the environment are grounded on nature as constructed because ideas of nature never exist outside a cultural context. If we want to understand why we think of nature like we do, then the nature we study must become less natural and more cultural, William Cronon argues (1996:35). Richard White also belongs to those who see nature as a human construction, only an idea, and argues that the use of the word “nature” is asserted with a unity, a set of relations, and a common identity that involves all the things humans have not made. Nature is, in this sense, purely cultural. He points out that different cultures produce different versions of nature (1996:183). This is reasonable since culture and history influence one's perceptions of nature. The point of constructions is that we add values to the nature and the physical environment.

Lynn White was one of the first to focus on the connection between the state of the environment and religion and she emphasised the Judeo-Christian domination in Western culture. White states that Christianity, especially in its Western form, is the most anthropocentric<sup>27</sup> religion by establishing a dualism of man and nature and insisting that it is

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<sup>27</sup> The environmental philosophy is divided into anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric (bio-centric) pathways (Ariansen, 1992:132). The main distinction relates to whether nature has an intrinsic value or not. Deep ecologists and animal rights movements believe nature has intrinsic value. The others believe that man respectfully can use nature.

*God's* will that man exploits nature for his proper ends. According to White, this explains why and how man becomes the rightful master of nature (1967:33-4).

Whereas control and domination are key concepts in the West, harmony and exploitation form the corresponding pair in China (Bruun 1995). Harmony between nature and people is the basic concept. In China nature represents resources to cultural expansions, in contrast to the West where nature is viewed as an entity separate from society. To live a harmonious life is to reflect the balance of nature. The most persistent and orthodox traditional view saw man as an integral part of a cosmos dominated by nature. Contentment and material success could only come through acceptance of man adjusting himself to the greater natural world to which he belonged. This was a central part of a philosophical and moral system (Murphey 1967: 314). Related to *Mao's war against nature*, Shapiro asserts that China has replaced traditional notions of harmony and adjustment (2001).

Poul Pedersen contends that our ecological vision of the environment is global, and different from traditional representations of nature. Pedersen calls the new perspective *the global ideology of nature*, which means the strong worldwide inclination to associate nature with ecology and conservation and stress the link to modernity rather than religion (1995:269). The countries compared have historically different perceptions of nature, but the similarities - the belief in a balanced relationship with nature - are also conspicuous. One distinction lies in the traditional Western separation of nature and culture. I believe Pedersen's approach will be increasingly more relevant due to the strong international consensus on sustainable policy in the wake of the Brundtland Report, and global communication and interaction. I see this as complementary rather than in contrast to traditional perceptions of nature.

Peter Coates discusses the Enlightenment's growing optimism and belief in progress, which I also find relevant to the concept of sustainability. He displays how Marxists<sup>28</sup> rejected the notion of environmental limits to economic growth and believed in the unlimited power of culture to mould nature in the interests of all people. However, the Frankfurt School's thinkers Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer realised that the modern ecological dilemma was more complicated than capitalism and class conflict. André Gorz and Raymond Williams were concerned about a socialism that sought only the social redistribution of natural resources, and contended that genuine human freedom and wealth involved more than economic emancipation. Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Roszak emphasised the industrial

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<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx wrote his doctoral thesis on the distinction in philosophy of nature between Epicurus and Democritus.

ethos and mode of production rather than the struggle between capitalism and socialism. Marx's concern was that capitalism was unfair and exploited people, and his worries were mainly social (Coates 1998). However, unions have almost ignored what André Gorz and Raymond Williams were concerned about; that genuine human freedom and wealth involved more than economic emancipation.

Newer scholars like David Pepper contends that capitalism itself is the problem due to its inherent environmentally unfriendliness and he advocates a homocentric new green socialism as a more viable and socially equitable alternative to elitist deep ecology<sup>29</sup> (ibid. pp.151-154). The nature and logic of capitalism and a specific mode of production are highly relevant in order to analyse trade unions' conceptions of sustainability and the solidarity approach, which Redclift, Adams and Langhelle pointed out above as well.

### **The nature of trade unions**

Theories on the labour movements are complex because they have historically taken widely different forms, even in the same country, and currently still do in various parts of the world. My attempt has therefore not been to find one trade union theory, but to find theories and concepts that clarify the nature of unions and explain their primary purpose and activities.

There are disagreements among theorists about their interpretation of the origin of trade unions. Karl Marx, the classic spokesman for revolutionary theory, holds that the proletariat is a product of the growth and development of industrial capitalism, and that workers seek to protect themselves by forming labour organisations. This makes unions products of class-consciousness. For Marx unions were *schools for socialism*. Other classic 19<sup>th</sup> Century scholars such as John R. Commons and Sidney and Beatrice Webb agreed with Marx that the class division generated by industrialisation is the primary factor in the development of trade unions. However, they did not draw the revolutionary conclusions that Marx did. John R. Commons believed it was the extension of the market that forced workers to unionise to protect themselves from the market's corrosive influence. Consequently, the enemy was the market, not the capitalists. The Webbs agreed with Marx that it was the transformation to wage earners in the capitalist wage system, which led to unionising. However, they did not agree that unions developed as part of a growing revolutionary movement; rather they believed that unions existed simply as economic protection devices for

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<sup>29</sup> Represent part of the environmental movement recognised as critical to growth, anti- industrialism and eco-centrism, distinct from Shallow ecology that fights against pollution and resource depletion. For further reading, see Ariansen 1992 and Bookchin 2002)

workers. On the other hand, the later Selig Perlman rejected the entire idea of class and class-consciousness as an explanation for the origin of unions and insisted that all manual labourers, peasants, modern wage earners and medieval master craftsmen were *manualists*. When the *manualists* become aware of a scarcity of opportunity, they band together into unions for the purpose of protecting their jobs and apportioning available employment opportunities on an equal basis.

When it comes to views on the essential function of and behaviour in unions, there is a broad diversity. Marxists advocate economic and independent political actions as essential functions, and believe that by defending the interests of the workers at the workplace and challenging the capitalist state, trade unions can advance their thinking from a narrower trade union consciousness to higher levels of class-consciousness. Syndicalists agree in the revolutionary goals, but focus on the economic struggle while strongly objecting to union involvement in politics (Larson and Nissen<sup>30</sup> 1987: 4-5).

To sum up, Commons and Perlman saw unions as a mechanism for workers to integrate into, rather than oppose, the capitalist system. The Webbs viewed unions as concerned primarily with protecting the economic interests of their workers, though they considered the labour movement as an essential part of a broader movement to reform the system by humanising working conditions and providing a liveable wage for all. Thus, the unions are not to take on a broad political agenda. These classic theories are still relevant in order to analyse the unions' multiplicity today.

Trade unions are products of the industrial revolution. To start at the beginning, "the growth of the British trade unions has largely been a spontaneous, healthy process arising out of the needs of the common people" (Flanders 1952:24). The struggle was for freedom and for existence. In order to define what a trade union is, Webb's classic definition is still appropriate: "a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment" (Hyman 2001:1-2). In other terms, a union is a collective unity of workers' interests, keeping in minds both their day-to-day economic struggles and their tendency to use broader political responses to further their aspirations. Additionally it is a social institution and learning environment (Tørres<sup>31</sup> 2000:213).

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<sup>30</sup> Simeon Larson is professor and chairman of the Department of Labour Studies at Rutgers University. Bruce Nissen was an assistant professor in Labour Studies at Indiana University, now Director of Research at the Centre for Labour Research and Studies at Florida International University in Miami.

<sup>31</sup> Liv Tørres, doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo.

Both LO and the ACFTU have historically pursued a highly political agenda. However, it is a weakness that current theories of unions are mainly theories of what unions were and did rather than theories of what unions will be and will do (Boeri et al. 2001:1). The labour historian professor Richard Hyman<sup>32</sup> is a valuable exception and I return to his prominent work on below. For my purpose, however, current and even old theories are useful to describe what unions are, but at the same time it is important to explore the potential for further development as well. Not least, this is essential in exploring unions' potential to promote sustainable development.

### **Typology of western trade unions**

The definitions and understanding of union activities vary; furthermore, their focus, goals and strategies vary to an even greater extent. Over time and across countries, unions have given their members different incentives, rights and obligations (Tørres 2000:212).

Richard Hyman contends that trade unions – both by their own members and officials as well as by outsiders – are primarily seen as economic agencies engaged in collective bargaining over routine terms and conditions of employment; as fighting organisations confronting employers in a struggle between hostile classes; or as components of the fabric of social order (2001). This is a common opinion of unions, particularly due to historical features.

Socialist conceptions of class interest shaped the emergence and consolidation of modern trade unionism in much of Europe. Hyman states that trade unions in twentieth century Europe have displayed a multiplicity of organisational forms and ideological orientations. The pluralism of trade unionisms, he says, is associated with conflicting definitions of the very nature of unionism, rival conceptions of the purpose of collective organisations, and opposing models of strategy and tactics, led to a split in labour movements in almost every European country (ibid).

Hyman states that the trade unions' character and orientation reflected the circumstances of their formation; brutal resistance by employers to assert independence and opposition, often accompanied by state repression. Such hostility made trade unions militant, and turned into anti-capitalist and radical political attitudes. They were not clearly distinguishable from revolutionary socialism. In the second part of the nineteenth century, “the more successful unions marginalizing and ritualising their radicalism and seeking

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<sup>32</sup> From the London School of Economics and Political Science.

understanding with employers on the basis of the maxim of “a fair day’s wage and a fair day’s work, a “pure-and-simple unionism” in Lenin’s vocabulary, an economic orientation rather than defending members’ immediate occupational interests (ibid.).

It is useful to divide European union patterns into British, North-European<sup>33</sup>, and South-European<sup>34</sup>. The British are reformists, but more militant and less centralised and bureaucratic than the North-European. They are also less willing to be incorporated in state apparatus. The North-European unions were from the beginning close to development of socialist labour parties. Bargaining is strongly centralised in these countries. Both these types have traditionally been wealthy, strong and united. In contrast, South-European unions have been politically split between communism and social democracy, are weak and lack the well-developed bargaining institutions that the North-European holds. However, their capacity to mobilise workers into actions have been strong. In addition, several European countries have religious unions, like Southern Europe, Belgium and Netherlands (Kjeldstadli 1979: 141-144). In the American and most English-speaking countries, business unionism have been dominant. Priority was given to collective bargaining and the unions’ primary tasks were occupational interests. These orientations drew the line between party politics and union actions (Hyman 2001). Chairman Mao forced the ACFTU to be a transmission belt, and therefore, Kjeldstadli’s typology is not useful for further categorisation.

### **Trade unions as transmission belts**

The ACFTU aims to raise workers’ status and the means have basically been state corporatism. In the early years, they struggled against imperialism and capitalism, but during the revolution, the Chinese political leadership did not accept any conflict between labour and capital since workers were the masters of the country. State socialist trade unions have been trade unions by name, but their role is not to defend the interests of its members in opposition to the state employer, rather to mobilize its members in support of state policies and to administer a large part of the social and welfare programs (Clarke 2005:4-5). The trade unions are, therefore, an integral part of the political party’s state apparatus. This characterisation of the ACFTU as a transmission belt in communist state theory requires a more specific description.

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<sup>33</sup> Germany and Scandinavia

<sup>34</sup> France, Spain and Italy

The Russian Communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin introduced the concept of the transmission belt in 1920 during a clash within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union regarding the role of the unions. Lenin declared that the Russian proletariat was "so divided, so degraded and so corrupted in parts", that the organisation could not conceivably exercise "proletarian dictatorship", it was only the vanguards, the Communist Party, that were capable of ruling. In the dictatorship of the proletariat, trade unions were the most important transmission belt since they linked the ruling class to its vanguards. Paul Harper underlines the importance of the transmission belt's role in allowing the unions to lead the workers on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (1969:84-86). The Chinese trade unions followed the Leninist pattern closely. A former president of the ACFTU and Dengist follower, Ni Zhifu, said trade unions had to be the Party's watchman on the shop floor (Morris 1985:54). In contrast, the common view in LO and the Labour party is that trade unions are important sounding boards for common people to air their concerns. However, the ACFTU is increasingly representing workers in the frame of a gradually more liberal practice of state corporatism (Husøy 2004, 2005).

### **Trade unions and corporatism**

Political or economic strategies decide the interaction between unions and the state, and consist, mainly of the one trying to obtain support from the other, unions seeking to improve their members' material benefits or the state trying to implement its economic model. The relationships are usually described in terms of pluralist or corporatist perspectives. A pluralist union is seen as an autonomous group competing for power, benefits and resources for its members. Such a union's goals are primarily economic, and autonomy from the state is essential. On the other hand, corporatists argue for the benefits of government, and that unions are not autonomous, but have tied their interests to the state (Tørres 2000:213-218).

State corporatism is a vital part of authoritarian regimes and has been discredited because it has generally been associated with fascistic political systems. In social democratic countries societal corporatism has been an important means to govern. Philippe C. Schmitter developed a valid theory on corporatism and defined it to be a system of interest representation, hierarchically ordered units with representational monopoly in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supporters (1974:93-94). Corporatism works in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. In state corporatism, the state has the control, and in western democracies the scale varies from

*pluralism* to *societal corporatism*, which entails influence from bottom up. Consensus is vital in *societal corporatism* (Nordby 1999:10). LO has strongly been involved in such decisions making processes.

Both trade unions interact with the state, LO in particular when the Labour Party is in power. In China it seems that the Communist Party has gradually given the ACFTU a more important role as a union. According to Anita Chan<sup>35</sup>, the ACFTU provides a two-way conduit between the party and the workers (1993:36). The introduction of tripartism, which has long traditions in Norway, is another example. My argument is that the ACFTU does not fit with an orthodox practice of state corporatism, but now operates between state corporatism and societal corporatism, to which I return in the next chapter.

### **The culture of trade unions**

The title of this section, the culture of trade unions, might causes some confusion. The culture of the working class and the labour movement and trade unions are often used in ways that overlap each another. I do not find it essential to explore this because I see trade unions as the dominant force in labour history and culture, and there are not necessarily distinct cultural differences between trade unions and other organisations in the labour movement. The main problem here is that in some cases it has been difficult to differentiate between the party's and the trade union's culture, for example the use of propaganda in both countries, in particular due to the Mao cult.

E.P. Thompson<sup>36</sup> was one of the most influential British historians. He asserted that the working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time, but was present at its own making. He emphasised class as a historical phenomenon, not a structure or a category, but as something that in fact happens in human relationship (1968:9). Raymond Williams was one of Britain's greatest post-war cultural historians and theorists and most influential and prolific thinkers. In addition, he was an early pioneer in the field of cultural studies. He contended that class-consciousness is the way in which class experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms (1989:8).

The working class culture is in Williams' interpretation not proletarian art or language, "but the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intentions

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<sup>35</sup> Professor Anita Chan from the Australian National University has published widely on Chinese workers' conditions, the Chinese trade union, and labour rights issues.

<sup>36</sup> His work *The making of the English working class* is a classic.



which proceed from this". Furthermore Williams described culture as "a whole way of life" and that "we are all in the game, and playing in one or other directions" (1963:307). In his work *Culture is Ordinary*, Williams makes the following statement: "A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people, and offered individual meanings, the product of a man's whole committed personal and social experiences", and he adds that these meanings in no way can be prescribed since "they are made by living, made and remade, in ways we cannot know in advance"<sup>37</sup> (1989:8).

Williams believed that there is a distinct working class way of life that emphasises "neighbourhood, mutual obligation, and common betterment, as expressed in the great working-class political and industrial institutions" (ibid). To contrast the working class from the bourgeois, Williams argued, that the crucial distinction is between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationship. The bourgeois' individualism places society, as a neutral area within which an individual is free to pursue their own development and advantage as a natural right. The working class saw society as the positive means for all kinds of development, including individual development and advantage. This is not individually, but commonly interpreted and the provision of means of life will be collective and mutual. According to Williams, class feeling was a mode rather than a uniform possession of all the individuals who might, objectively, be assigned to that class (1963:312-313). From this, one might assert that a working class idea does not mean that all working people possess it, but that it is embodied in the working class's organisations and institutions. Williams underlined that class is a collective mode and not a person. These authors guide me to the conclusion that the culture of trade unions is comparable to working class culture, including the different kinds of institutions, organisations and everyday life. It is my belief that these theories are universal and are appropriate to my purpose, even bearing in mind the disparities between LO and the ACFTU. Adopting the approach of Williams and Thompson, there is no strict definition of what the culture of trade unions is, but rather several concepts depending on the purpose of the examination.

Trade unions, confederations or federations constitute in general terms different internal interests and power relations. In order to analyse the culture of trade unions, the concept of *hegemonic power*, introduced by the Italian Marxist and political theorist Antonio Gramsci, is useful (1971). The construction of hegemony is initially established by social forces occupying a leading role within a state, or in my case within organisations, and is

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<sup>37</sup> This is from an article concerning the Marxist interpretation of culture.

understood as an expression of broadly based consent, manifested in the acceptance of ideas and supported by material resources. An alternative conception of hegemony stems from Raymond Williams and is first and foremost linked to traditions and conservatism (Engelstad 2003). Such approaches are highly relevant in order to analyse a union's internal life as well as the role in society. Likewise, it is relevant to the discussion on trade unions and sustainability in light of industrial unions' hegemonic power, which emphasises on energy supply in order to advance employment, and is something on which I focus. Trade unions' hegemonic power is basically about solidarity and the solidarity culture has been overwhelmingly focused on job creation. The doctrine of China's proletarian dictatorship and the ACFTU's more or less reluctant acceptance of being a subordinated transmission belt is a kind of hegemonic power as well.

### **The culture of solidarity**

In the following, my cultural approach will be that of solidarity as the backbone of trade unionism. In order to go beyond the traditional and popular notion of trade union solidarity, I draw on concepts developed from Emile Durkheim's theory on solidarity. In his work of 1893, Durkheim classified moral rules by defining solidarity in two ways, *mechanical* and *organic*. The mechanical expresses the conditions of solidarity *sui generis*, which derive from resemblances and the organic arising from the division of labour, basically grounded on uniformity (1989:331). Durkheim stated that since the division of labour became the predominant source of social solidarity, it also became the foundation of the moral order (*ibid.* p. 333). His approach was that common or collective consciousness and social solidarity was based on ethical values, emphasising what the consequences of the division of labour were on cohesion and solidarity of societies (Coser 1989: xiii). Organic solidarity characterises the human dependence in modern societies. The challenge is to merge solidarity and the quest of sustainable development.

My point here is to clarify the notion of solidarity as a result of the division of labour, a predominant source that still inspires unions to solidarity action worldwide. Originally solidarity was based on a notion of class interest and implied a strong degree of collective orientation. However, Durkheim's moral aspect guides me to make a distinction between solidarity and self-interest. This is relevant to my thesis because the conditions of sustainability imply solidarity with future generations, idealistically speaking even at the expense of workers' short-term self-interests, such as when having to close down polluting factories. This makes solidarity complex and difficult. On the other hand, self-interest has a

rational aspect for workers when concerning environmental pollution and degradation. Workers have interests as workers at the workplace and in the surrounding areas, where they might live, but also as members of society at large.

The Polish philosopher and theologian Professor Józef Tischner, was a central figure in the ideological formation of *Solidarity* in Poland. He focuses on the ethics of solidarity, and contends solidarity is the willingness to carry one another's burdens (1984:16-17). Tischner gave emphasis to exploited workers' experiences. He contended that proletarians organised themselves because they felt left out of society and that unionists shared the same faith and had the same destiny.

The creation of both trade unions and political parties may be considered an expression of the idea of solidarity, and the idea was transformed to a modern broad concept of solidarity (Stjernø 2005:93). This approach is useful in order to illuminate the use of the term and to distinguish solidarity in trade union cultures from political ideologies. Hence, the distinctions are not necessarily apparent in my study, where the trade unions are closely linked to political parties, certainly in quite different ways.

Early Marxist theorists rarely applied the concept of solidarity. Other terms like worker unity, internationalism and fraternity or brotherhood were more frequently applied. Neither Lenin nor Mao was preoccupied with the term solidarity. Mao applied unity<sup>38</sup> as a central concept, both within the communist party itself, and between the party and the masses. Mao reserved solidarity mainly for denoting international relationship with friendly parties and countries (ibid. pp. 53-56).

Ultimately, another important aspect of trade union solidarity is that it has been distinct from charity; it is more political than random social or economic aid.

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<sup>38</sup>A Sinologist told me that the term solidarity is not commonly used in Chinese vocabulary.

## 4. PRESENTATION OF LO AND THE ACFTU

*If trade unions are dinosaurs, we must all be living in Jurassic Park.*  
(David Ransom)

In order to portray strengths and weaknesses, disparities and similarities in this chapter, I describe LO and the ACFTU past and present, emphasising the various roles they play in society and vital historical processes and events they were involved in. I compare the formation and development, aims and means of struggle, conflicts and political struggles, political ties and environmental policies. In order to conceptualise how unions deal with environmental protection, I provide some examples from LO. I have placed emphasis on the Chinese trade unions, due to the questions that could be raised about their political influence and how they conduct their activities as trade unions when deriving from a communist transmission belt. Related to the latter, I have stressed the consequences social and economic reforms have on industrial relations and the ACFTU. To achieve a more comprehensive picture of the ACFTU, I provide an overview of trade unions and labour relations in the Eastern-Asian region as well. In this chapter, I would briefly like to present LO's and the ACFTU's environmental policies until my specific examination.

### The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO)

*"Early to bed, early to rise – work like hell and organize!"*<sup>39</sup>  
(Former LO President Gerd-Liv Valla at the 2001 Congress)

LO is decidedly the largest and most influential workers' organisation in Norway with nearly 830 000 members in about 2500 primary trade union organisations. 40 000 of the members are union representatives at the shop floor. That is approximately 28% of the total workforce and more than half of the organised workers. The membership fee varies between the different national and local branches, usually a few percent of the salary. Being free and independent are the basic principles.

Its sphere of action and interest embraces the whole society, though subjects of particular concern to LO are the fight against unemployment, wage bargaining and working conditions, social security and equal rights, the working environment, the external environment, and international solidarity and cooperation (LO, 2001a:5). LO exerts considerable effort on influencing all decisions that affect its members. LO takes part in

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<sup>39</sup> The citation is an old American trade union slogan.

tripartite cooperation<sup>40</sup> together with the state and the employers' organisation, and is often consulted before the Government adopts its approaches to social and economic matters. LO is represented in the corporate assembly and in the boards in order to voice workers' interests.

Wage and income developments within the Norwegian society are largely determined in negotiations between LO's national unions and the employers during the central collective bargaining settlements and through local negotiations. The centralist legacy of LO has been counterbalanced by a strong tradition of decentralised activity. In the private sector, trade unions serve important functions in local bargaining.

If the parties fail to reach agreement, or the ballot shows that the members reject the proposed new agreement, this will generally lead to a conflict. All strikes must be authorized by LO's Executive Committee. The Basic Agreement (s)<sup>41</sup> has worked to develop a good relationship between the industrial partners. The Agreement (s) aims to define the rules and to ensure industrial peace as long as the collective agreement is in force. Neither strike nor lockout shall occur, but sympathy and political strikes are not affected by this obligation. The Agreements describe the rights and obligations of the employers and the elected union representatives. Disputes on the interpretation of the Basic Agreements and the collective agreements must be resolved by negotiations. If negotiations break down one of the parties may bring the dispute before the Labour Court (LO 2002b ).

LO establishes contacts and cooperation across national borders to solve important tasks. Its aim is to work both through international organisations and directly with national trade union movements to ensure maximised efforts for freedom, equality and equity. The main objective of international cooperation is to empower its partners sufficiently in terms of funding and knowledge to enable them to play their rightful role as a force in shaping a democratic society (ibid ). Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) is LO's humanitarian organisation. LO is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the former ICFTU.

## **The birth and growth of LO**

The labour history in Norway relates back to the Marcus Thrane movement in the end of 1840 (Bull 1988:25). In the following years workers organised in smaller groups, not all as trade

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<sup>40</sup> A cooperation between employees' organization (s), the employers' organization and the government body - increasingly common worldwide.

<sup>41</sup> In Norwegian Hovedavtalen

unions, some were combat unions; others had a social character. At this time Norway was a backyard poor peasant society. According to Olstad one of the explanations of the workers' opposition was due to paternalism (1991).

Trade union pioneers established the Norwegian Labour Party<sup>42</sup> in 1887 to boost their political influence on society. Traditionally the blue-collar federations and the socialist and social democratic parties were considered as two parts of the labour movement. The close relationship between LO and the Labour Party has always been a basic pillar in Norwegian Labour Movement and from its foundation there was little distinction between trade unionism and political activities (Bjørghum 1999:31). LO claims that the cooperation with the Labour party is practised on a free and evenly matched basis (LO 2002b). The relationship between LO and the Labour party is to a certain degree still controversial in both organisations. The cooperation is today formally organised through a joint committee made up by the leadership of the party and LO, which meets on a weekly basis.

LO was established in 1899 as a confederation of unions. There were several strikes and lockouts, occasionally spontaneous in character in these early years. Hard battles had to be fought before the workers secured the right to join trade unions' and hard and bitter labour disputes advanced the labour movement into its breakthrough in the 1920's and 1930's (LO:2002b). These years were particularly hard times for the poor and unemployed.

LO's membership declined in the 1970s, but not considerably compared to other European countries. Services, in particular public welfare, became a new important sector. In the 1980s and 1990s, market economy, neo-liberalism and restructuring of the public sector were dominant. LO still has a problem with recruitment of new members, in particular in growing private service sectors and among academics. LO is still the dominant union force partly due to both its historical hegemony among blue-collar workers in core manufacturing industries and partly due to its organisation of a substantial proportion of employees in the growing public sector (Dølvik 1998:7). In conclusion, politically LO constitute a powerful force, but has relatively decreased membership due to competition from other trade unions.

In Norway, the belief in planned economies, state-owned industrialisation and energy intensive industries was important to offer people work and welfare. Export industries became a central sector. The slogans were growth and wealth, similar to the Chinese situation in the 1950s and 1960s, and this is still the current policy. This period was the golden age and the

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<sup>42</sup> In the following termed the Labour Party.

welfare state developed in the new oil age. However, environmental issues were put on the agenda in the 1970s. Growth and conservation replaced growth and wealth (Furre 1991:402).

### **From revolutionary aims to compromises**

From the beginning the labour movement was fragmented without any clear political ideology, however, revolutionary goals were discussed in the years to come. *Fagopposisjonen* from 1911, with Martin Tranmæl<sup>43</sup> as the most dominate figure, called for a more revolutionary policy from LO. The left wing succeeded and enjoyed majority at the Labour party congress in 1918 (Bjørnson 1990:408 and 410). The rhetoric on revolution and communism speeded up after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The Russian revolution was an ideal and Lenin was a hero. However, the revolutionary attempts ended in rhetorical terms.

The former President of LO, Ole O. Lian, stated in 1914 that the right to strike is vital to trade union power<sup>44</sup> (Bull 1988). Despite this stance LO contributed to important social compromises during the hard years in the interwar period. When speaking about the ACFTU's lack of autonomy, it is ironical that LO almost renounced the right to strike under the rule of the Labour Party during the period of the reconstruction after World War II (Bull 1984). "We cannot strike against ourselves"<sup>45</sup> wrote LO's vice president Gunnar Bråthen (Bråthen 1945:3). This is an important aspect of the close political ties between LO and the ruling Labour party, certainly less rigid, but relevant to the Chinese ideology that ordered workers as the masters of the country. According to Bull, there was in fact a ban on strikes and several wages decisions were stopped by arbitration<sup>46</sup> in the following years. Bull relates this to the power of the partnership of elites (Bull 1984).

The interaction between capital and labour was formalised in the first national wage agreement, signed in 1907 by the Iron and Metal Workers Union and their counterparts (Olstad 1991:65-66). I consider this institutionalisation of the labour relations to be a kind of industrial compromise. The second historical compromise developed in the first Basic Agreement between LO and the employers in 1935. The Basic Agreement is still working and regulates vital conditions in labour relations.

<sup>43</sup> Martin Tranmæl was later a central politician, member of the executive board of the Labour Party from 1918 to 1963, editor of the party's newspaper *Social-Demokraten* (later *Arbeiderbladet* and *Dagsavisen*) and member of LO's secretariat I most part of the period from 1920 to 1946.

<sup>44</sup> Norwegian quotation: "Hele fagorganisasjonens innflytelse hviler på retten til streik"

<sup>45</sup> Norwegian quotation: "Vi kan ikke streike mot oss selv"

<sup>46</sup> In Norwegian *lønnsnemd* (AOF 1992).

The final “compromise” was the Solidarity Alternative in the 1990s, an economic policy model of the labour movement, where the organisations of working life and wage formation are seen in relation to the Government’s use of economic policy instruments. According to LO it was a way to control the economy, an alternative to the excessive market economy. The idea was to build on the advantages of the Norwegian social model in order to generate a real increase in employment. Central issues were to consolidate solidarity in wage formation and more equity in distribution politics (LO1997). However, the logic in the compromise was criticised (Heiret 2003:196). I mention this because I believe this could form ideas of a new type of solidarity that includes environmental issues.

LO’s willingness to compromise implicated moderation in the field of collective agreement, focus on rationalisation and modernisation and emphasis on political solutions, in Olstad’s term it is the social democracy (1991:111-113).

Dølvik examined the revival of centralised trade union power in Norway since the mid-1980s, and argues that LO, in contrast to widespread predictions, has achieved a remarkable revival in societal influence. He states that this has been due to the strong central authority and cohesion of LO, which has reaped the benefits of its ties with former Labour governments. Dølvik remarks that the relatively successful union role in the Norwegian *social compromises* has contributed to a more positive conception of trade unions in society at large, and has provided unions with the public image of being *social partners* (1998: 26). If one single image should characterise LO’s history, it should be that of *social compromises* and it should be considered in light of the tight political ties with the Labour party. However, wage negotiation and strikes have been important means as well.

### **LO’s environmental policy**

Martin Byrkjeland examined LO ‘s environmental policy of from 1960 to 2000 on the basis of its congresses. On an early stage LO was aware of the necessity of environmental involvement, but sufficient attention was not devoted to it. Byrkjeland says the 1961 Congress was the last when LO was entirely happy – because it was the last one solely centred on growth optimism. In the end of the 1960’s LO articulated environmental point of view, and attempted to unit trade union interests as both employees and citizens with protection of nature and humans against harmful effects from industrial production. During the 1970s and 1980s LO focused the working environment, isolated from the outer environment. According to Byrkjeland the 1989 Congress appears to be the greenest so far, with environment technology optimism and believe in environment as a positive readjustment



factor. This optimistic approach flattens out in the 1990s. Byrkjeland argues that the skeleton in the environmental cabinet in LO is the policy on energy supply. During the 1990s it became clearer that the energy policy divided the industrial trade unions, basically the unions in oil and chemical sectors and engineering, and the trade unions in public sector (2000). This can be related to Hans Chr. Bugge's critique of environmental policy at the national political level when he blames the gas sector, mentioned in chapter 1 (2002). It seems that the energy enthusiasts won the game in both LO and nationally. However, Byrkjeland concludes that despite workers have been afraid of their jobs; it has been a great support to put the fight against pollution and environmental poison on the agenda (2000).

After the 1992 Rio Conference<sup>47</sup>, LO gave priority to the environment as one of three prioritised tasks in Plan of action in the period 1993-1997. LO was involved in several environmental activities and The Norwegian foundation for Sustainable Consumption and Production (the GRIP Centre<sup>48</sup>) (Parmann 1997<sup>49</sup>)

PULS<sup>50</sup> was an important local environmental project. 14 trade unions and local branches in Grorud valley, an area of Oslo with extensive residential and industrial areas, started their own environmental project in 1988, supported by LO in Oslo<sup>51</sup>. Their aim was to set an environmentally friendly course for their own unions and LO, and to raise environmental awareness among the members and employees in the companies associated with PULS. They also made efforts to build up a close relationship between the trade union movement, industry and local residents in Grorud valley. They collaborated with several other actors such as schools, nature conservation societies, the women's institute, hunting and fishing societies and other parts of the local community. PULS initiated a number of other measures including a course for its members, spotlight on the public transport network for the industrial areas of Grorud valley, participation in projects to strengthen the reputation of industry in Oslo, linking industry up with research centres, and the development of environmental technology.

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<sup>47</sup> UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (the Earth Summit).

<sup>48</sup> The forerunner was Green Working Life (Grønt Arbeidsliv).

<sup>49</sup> This report was made as a Norwegian Special Report to the special session for evaluation of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Five years after, to the UN's General Assembly. It was cooperation between organisations and environmental management bodies.

<sup>50</sup> Fagbevegelsens miljøprosjekt i Grodruddalen.

<sup>51</sup> At that time it was known by the name Oslo Faglige Samorganisasjon.

There have been several specific environmental projects by local trade unions as well. One example is from Norske Skogs Saugbruks in Halden for cleaning Iddefjorden, which had been seriously polluted for years (Valla 2001). However, the demands from the environmental management were also adjusted for a while. In recent years, environmental projects seem to be fewer and more sporadic. One of the reasons might be the institutionalisation of environmental rules and management. This might explain the crisis of the notion of sustainability as well, which neglects the new dimension of sustainable growth and does not attach the root causes. However, the emphasis on HSE has been more continuous.

To sum up: the common feature of LO as an environmental latecomer gives not an accurate picture. Unionists have been concerned about environmental issues, but the intensity of the involvement varies, for example the strength of environmental debates as we saw after the Brundtland Report was launched.

## **The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU)**

*A union leader ought to have a mother's heart, a grandma's nagging tongue and a pair of legs that never stop running*  
(The ACFTU President Wang Zhaoguo)

The ACFTU is a mass organisation of the working class with more than 137 million members in more than 1.7 million primary trade union organisations<sup>52</sup>. According to the ACFTU the membership rate is less than 60%. In China, union membership is more or less compulsory (Clarke 2005:5). The companies pay two percent of the membership fee to the ACFTU and the members pay 0.5 percent of their salaries. In contrast to LO, union leaders are mainly appointed. The CCP most probably have influenced these processes. Union election is gradually being introduced (Chan 2004).

The ACFTU's constitution manifests that its aim is "to strive for building China into a prosperous, powerful, democratic and civilised modern socialist country", led by the Communist Party and pursuing to be "a bridge and bond linking the Party and the masses of the workers". The democratic perspective is "the socialist state power of the people's democratic dictatorship" (ACFTU 2005b). The general principles declare that the ACFTU is a mass organisation of the working class and the representative of the interests of the trade union members and workers, guided by Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng

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<sup>52</sup> These figures, quoted from the ACFTU's homepage, seem to be rather high. Partly due to bureaucratic routines and partly due to the fact that membership is more or less compulsory, the accurate number can be questioned. During my work the figures have increased with three million new members, mainly from migrant workers. This is reasonable since this part of the work force recently was permitted to be organised.

Xiaoping's theory. The Trade Union Law regulates the activities. The Labour Law deals with labour contracts and collective contracts, working hours, rest and vacations, wages, Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), social insurance and welfare, labour disputes, and supervision and inspections.

The ACFTU proclaims to play an important role in the political, economic and social affairs of the country and to strive for the realisation of China's *socialist modernisation* during the development of a socialist market economy. The basic duty is to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the workers and staff members. An important task is to promote economic development and long-term social stability of the country. The ACFTU form part of the state bureaucracy and has fought hard to elevate its status and has attained some success through *state corporatism* (Chan 1993, Unger and Chan 1995). This means that the ACFTU tries to take part in the government's decision making by concepts of tripartite cooperation while also trying to maintain some autonomy.

The Labour Laws have been revised several times, and though the system has several shortcomings, the ACFTU itself is moving in the direction of more autonomy in order to play the role of a trade union in industrial relations (Chen 2000, 2003). The nature of collective contracts, which basically is an individual contract, and the negotiation system, has developed during recent years<sup>53</sup>. However, the claimed consultations on equal footing have to be explored in view of the fact that the ACFTU have been a subordinated transmission belt and this reflects one of the Chinese contradictions. On the other hand, as asserted above, the circumstances and the nature of the ACFTU are changing. The extent and nature of consultations and collective contracts can also be questioned (Leung 2002)<sup>54</sup>.

The ACFTU has established relations with more than 400 national and local trade unions in more than 130 countries. The main tasks are development, workers rights and interests, as well as social programmes. One aspect of their international work is to strengthen bilateral ties and "learn from the beneficial experiences of trade unions of all countries" (Chinese Trade Unions 2004, No. 3). The ACFTU is a member of the communist World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and participates in collaboration on globalisation, for example the Beijing Consensus 2004, established by neighbouring, African and Middle East trade unions.

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<sup>53</sup> In 2002 the system of consultation on an equal footing and collective contracts was established in 635 000 enterprises, accounting for almost 50 percent of the total number of enterprises, the vast majority in state owned enterprises (ACFTU: 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Trini Leung is an independent analyst of Chinese politics and social movements.

## The birth and growth of the ACFTU

*China's workers have lost their world.*  
(Marc J. Blecher)

Elizabeth Perry<sup>55</sup> demonstrates that strikes and organised labour can be traced back to 1895 when China was overwhelmingly poverty-stricken (1993). The official story tells us that the first All-China Labour Congress was held in 1922 and that the All-China General Federation was founded in 1925 (Li 1998:196 and the ACFTU's homepage). In contrast to Norway, where unions established the Labour party, the CCP, which was formed in Shanghai in 1921, initiated the creation of the Chinese union federation. The Bolshevik Revolution inspired Chinese radicals, and Western visitors and Komintern representatives introduced Marxism.

A politicised atmosphere dominated China after the downfall of the dynastic rule in 1911. The protest march by workers and intellectuals in many big cities on May 4<sup>th</sup> 1919 is recognised as a watershed in China's modern history. The protest was in response to the decision of the Versailles Peace Conference to allow Japan to take over German concessions in Shangdong (Rimmington 1998:15). The themes were nationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-warlordism and the call for a new society that could embrace democracy and science (Wang 2002: 11-13). In an atmosphere of anger, humiliation and disillusionment the Nationalist revolution took place in 1922, and China was later ruled by the Kuomintang Party (KMT) from 1927 to 1937, under the brutal leadership of Chiang Kai-shek and his military dictatorship. In most cases labour unrest was brutally repressed, particularly the turmoil that led to the Shanghai massacre of 1927.

The communists and the KMT joined forces in order to combat the Japanese invasion in 1937. Thereafter, the communists defeated the nationalists in the civil war and established the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. From that time the ACFTU was incorporated in the permanent revolution and became a subordinated transmission belt. However, the subordination was not to be taken for granted and the union opposed this on several occasions.

Workers expected better wages, safer working conditions, and taking part in enterprise management when the CCP took office (Pringle 2001). The ACFTU played an important role

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<sup>55</sup> Professor Elizabeth Perry at Harvard University is an expert in comparative studies with special expertise in the politics of China.

at the beginning of the Communist Revolution, until the CCP claimed to represent the interests of the working classes. The ideology that workers were the masters of the country inferred a formal setting without conflict of interests in the world of work. The party called on the unions to turn the struggle from politics to increasing the production. Nevertheless, there were confrontations and contradictions during the Mao era about the role of the ACFTU and the relationship between the CCP (Pringle 2001, Harper 1969).

In the 1950s, industrial socialisation was introduced and workers lost both income and political input (Perry 2002:206). The labour policies and system<sup>56</sup> during the Maoist period embraced a package of measures that included the workers' share of social output in the form of distribution of wages, bonuses, allowances and subsidies, as well as the allocation of subsidised housing, the provision of health and social welfare benefits, and coupons to purchase consumer goods. This is referred to as the *Danwei* system, work units through which party and government officials control social, political and economic behaviour of residents. Workers were recruited by the state on the basis of annual quotas. In practice, it was impossible to change jobs or to be fired. *The Iron Rice Bowl* is a Chinese idiom referring to this system. The ACFTU protected workers' rights in the context of what the CCP claimed to represent the interest of the working class, and any manifestation of trade union syndicalism was condemned and punished by the Party. In the 1960s, trade unions worked together with party bureaucrats at the local levels in order to promote workers' welfare, production and increased specialisation rather than the thoughts of Mao. Similar production goals were focused in the same period in Norway.

CCP has so far not recognised the conflict between capital and labour. Chinese union leaders are often parts of the enterprise management and unions are therefore often aligned with the management rather than workers. In China the interaction between union officials and members is close to non-existent, and the same is to be said about real representation (Metcalf and Li 2005). This indicates the problems related to the dual role the ACFTU plays with its double identity, discussed below, which is uncommon in Norway.

Anita Chan points out that Chinese unions sometimes are totally inactive to the extent that workers do not even know of their existence and that lower-level trade union cadres have no concept of activist trade unionism and have never been exposed to the idea of grassroots organising from the bottom (2006). In contrast, local unions in Norway have a long tradition of union activism. In China, the mentality has been different and the degree of voluntary

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<sup>56</sup> Meaning urban state employees.

membership is questioned. The top-down recruitment has been related to welfare distribution during the Mao era and the work unit also worked like a political control mechanism. The ACFTU is currently facing restructuring processes with privatisation and marketisation. The membership has declined, partly due to unemployment and political and economic grievances, and partly due to the ACFTU's ineffective position. Today the membership is growing, first and foremost among migrant workers. One of the ACFTU's main challenges is to visualise its results in order to fulfil members' interests, if not, the workers will question its legitimacy.

The ACFTU experiences financial insecurity due to the fact that private and foreign-owned enterprises often refuse to pay the 2% payroll levy. They also lack skills and competence to play a proper union role with only one or two decades experience after the notion of a labour market was introduced.

### **The Cultural Revolution and beyond**

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a struggle for power initiated by Chairman Mao to regain control over the party. During the Cultural Revolution, the Party alleged that revisionists<sup>57</sup> who solely concentrated on productions and economic demands of workers dominated the unions. In the following years, workers participated in different contrary groups (Perry 2002:266-267). The ACFTU suspended activities for eleven years.

After their dissolution during the Cultural Revolution, trade unions experienced a "phoenix-like growth" with emphasis on the restoration of organised labour and a gradual return to the traditional heritage of trade union work - acceptance of managerial control in the pursuit of greater productivity (Morris 1985:51). After the Mao era, workers supported Deng Xiaoping's new policy because he generated expectations towards economic returns. After the devastation of the Cultural Revolution, trade unions' primary roles have been to participate in allocating enterprise-based social welfare benefits and to maintain production orders.

The new era orchestrated a shift in defining the industrial employee's role from that of producer to agent of structural change within and outside the workplace. Morris examined the period of 1976-83 and concluded that the trade unions contributed towards economic reforms and that a certain tacit industrial pluralism existed. Trade unions acted as labour's protector in circumstances where official policy and managerial action diverged (Morris 1985:63-65).

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<sup>57</sup> This is similar to Economism in Lenin's term.

### **The post Mao era and worker's protest**

After Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, the ACFTU became increasingly influential (Chan 2002). The economic reforms stimulated workers' aspirations, often thwarted by increasing inequality, insecurity and a sense of injustice. These pressures triggered the emergence of mass protests in 1989. The workers role in the democratic movement and the Tiananmen Square protest in Beijing are usually underestimated (Chan 1993, Walder and Gong 1993). The democracy movement erupted across the breadth of China. However, it is difficult and almost impossible to draw strict distinctions between independent individual workers and ACFTU members.

In the early 1980s, the Polish *Solidarity* movement was an important inspiration for the Chinese opposition (Sheehan 1998: 209-216). Solidarity was the first successful workers' revolution in a communist led country and turned out to be a "first death knell for the domino-like collapse of communism in Eastern Europe" (Chan 1993:32). Tony Saich points out that orthodox party leaders throughout the 1980s had been worried that a Solidarity-type popular opposition might confront them (1990:197), something Chen calls Solidarity-phobia and thus suspect its motivation (Chen 2003:1027). However, Saich argues that the protest movement differed because the working class played a dominant role in Poland (1990:205). Nevertheless, the Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation was an important part of the democratic movement. I return to the discussion on Chinese versus Polish experiences in chapter 7.

After the Tiananmen protests, the CCP tightened its grip on the trade unions (Chan 1993). Some scholars state that the tight control is still unchallenged (Clarke 2005, Leung 2000). One might argue that the ACFTU operates by a slight edge in conducting their union work vis-à-vis the government.

### **Economic change and its impact on the ACFTU**

Labour relations are bearing the greatest burden of the transition process in China. The ACFTU faces severe challenges in the new situation and economic change has significant impact on the nature of trade unionism. Previously, the relationship between workers and management was largely cooperative, and there were no financial incentives to provide effective and efficient work. Today the relationship is based primarily on an exchange of economic interest rather than on ideology, comradeship or collectivism. The former labour systems and policies are now in a state of flux (Mackerras 2001:129). The market economy

has contributed to an international business culture. Tongqing Feng and Minghua Zhao highlights the divide and interchange of interests between workers and management as a new dimension in labour matters, something which appears to be leading to a weakening of the party's role and control in labour relations (1996:8).

The liberalisation of policies, restructuring of state owned enterprises (SOE) to private enterprises, and rationalisation of the agricultural sector has resulted in an incredible number of redundancies, increasing numbers of new entrants to the work force from rural areas, housing shortages, and other social problems. The *de-danweisation* has worsened the situation for the workers dramatically.

The ACFTU has conducted a survey to identify obstacles in the working system that impedes unions from doing their jobs. The literature indicates that this is quite a serious problem in China (Chan 2006, Metcalf and Li 2005). To Anita Chan the condition for migrant workers, in particular at the sweatshops, evoked thoughts of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Dickensian<sup>58</sup> industrial revolution.

### **Internal opposition**

In the early years after the transition, the ACFTU was attacked through the nationwide strategic reduction of the labour force, and was forced to confront a situation in which they were not needed or attractive to members, nor capable of dealing with the changed environment. According to Feng and Zhao, unions were placed under such pressure that their very survival was brought to the top of their agenda (1996:15-16)<sup>59</sup>. This relates back to 1993 when China's top unions leaders were alarmed that it had become extremely difficult to collect income from lower level trade unions. The ACFTU received less than 10 percent of the total annual budget, with the transfer of funds being blocked at the lower levels. Both provinces and counties refused to deliver any money upward in the union hierarchy: "Well, if you [the ACFTU] are not more than a government agency, why should we bother to support you?" said many shop floor workers and enterprise union leaders (ibid).

This was only one of several serious problems the ACFTU was forced to face at the beginning of the 1990s. Other cases indicated that the ACFTU was being alienated from workers and from its grass-root level branches, and in certain extreme cases some unions

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<sup>58</sup> A symbolic comparison I found in the work of Anita Chan (1993).

<sup>59</sup> This paper is provided for a seminar attended by China's senior union leaders at the invitation of the General Secretary of the ACFTU in 1993. The basic material is from Tongqing and Minghua's book 'Speak without Reservations: Heart-to-Heart talks with Grassroots Trade Union Leaders'.



were even completely removed from the enterprise by management. Senior trade union leaders stressed that unions must represent workers (*ibid.* p. 5). I believe these events represent a turning point for Chinese trade unionism. The choice was whether or not to have a union – with all the implications the threat of independent trade unions represented and therefore the ACFTU had to be more than a transmission belt.

These internal crises must be understood in the context of the radical shift of both economic and social reforms that required completely different skills to those the ACFTU was familiar with. Today's increasing focus and emphasis on trade unionism, and the strengthening of labour relations, working conditions and the legal system should be viewed in the context of both the Polish experiences and the nationwide labour unrest that occurred after the transition period was introduced.

There are in fact ongoing labour unrests, protests, demonstrations, picketing and group petitioning against despotic management, corruption and incompetent politicians and party cadres all over the country. According to China's Public Security Ministry there were 87 000 cases in 2005 of what they call public order disturbances. Compared to 2004, 74 000 cases were reported (Lum 2006). These are organised by workers themselves, basically in rural areas.

This demonstrates that Chinese workers are not a silent mass, but act and react on deteriorated living conditions. It is a paradox that China, which pursues a harmonious society with social stability, has an industrial history that up until the present day have been dominated by labour unrests. One might argue that the union soul has survived despite the repression in both the pre- and the post-Mao era.

### **The ACFTU's Chinese characteristics**

Anita Chan examines the nature of the Chinese trade unions and rejects to a certain degree that the ACFTU is a powerless body of an authoritarian party-state that cannot protect workers' rights. She describes the ACFTU as an "elephant" made up of many parts and says the effectiveness in protecting workers' rights varies from level to level, region to region and in many cases depends on individual union officials (Chan 2002).

Feng Chen also opposes the stereotypical images of the ACFTU as a state instrument designed to control industrial workers and being powerless when it comes to defending workers' interests. Chen states that the ACFTU undertakes a role in labour disputes and that the union exerts pressure in workers' legal cases, representing them before arbitration committees or in court, provoking public discourse on the labour rights issues, and promoting

pro-labour legislation. Chen underlines that despite the country's one-party rule, the sole recognised union constitute part of the labour struggle (2003). Chen stresses the *double institutional identity* and the contradictions that occur in the paternalist state when trade unions represent both the state apparatus and the labour organisation (ibid.). The Trade Union Law imposes two virtually incompatible obligations on unions – to both represent the interests of the striking workers and to assist the enterprise in restoring work order. This is fundamental due to free and independent unions and has been a vital aim from its origin. On the other hand, as we have seen from LO's history, LO strongly identified itself with the Labour government in the reconstruction period in order to control wages, prices and industrial relations, although this was only for a short period. In China the dependency have lasted, yet to different degrees up through the years.

The legal regulation reflects the friction between the state's desire to push unions to function more like their counterparts in other market systems, and its reluctance to accept the industrial consequences, such as the potential for greater workplace conflicts. The state promotes the use of collective labour contracts, but there is little real negotiation. However, Simon Clarke recognises that such trade unions were consulted in the elaboration and implication of social, labour and wage policy and even lobbied for increased living standards and social welfare provision, but enjoyed to be the junior partner in the power bloc, to subordinate their members' aspiration to the building of the radiant future (2005). This is in accordance with Chan and Chen's analyses above.

According to Feng Chen, the ACFTU calls for the redefinition of the status of the ACFTU and their role in the market economy. The ACFTU has been allowed to expand and consolidate its bureaucratic power and to make appeals to the interests of the workers (2003). In her recent work, Anita Chan concludes that the ACFTU is beginning to make an effort to break away from the tight grip of *state corporatism* (2004:72). Trini Leung levels severe criticism against the ACFTU's efforts and believes there is no critical change in the power structure within or surrounding the ACFTU (2002). I agree with Anita Chan and find that Leung's criticism was made in a context that is not realistic in China in the foreseeable future. The rationale behind my approach is rather to identify positive signals in democratic directions that make the ACFTU more able to operate as trade unions without changing the entire political system in China. It is my belief that the alternative to the ACFTU today is a more servile union leadership. In another study, I have argued that the ACFTU during the period of market economy has a greater room in which to act, enlarged their sphere of influence, established important labour mechanisms, and the ACFTU happens to be a more

dynamic organisation (Husøy 2004). A major problem is the implementation of laws and regulations.

The ACFTU is fighting on two fronts and they conduct their union work in ways of pro-activism in order to improve the CCP's policy. The assertion that the ACFTU cannot protect workers' rights is necessarily not the whole truth. One might argue that the ACFTU increasingly follows social-democratic countries in conducting union work, but they have to move slowly. However, it is considered to be an image problem that the Government benefits on the ACFTU's efforts because labour improvements usually are introduced as Government policies and the process behind is unknown for the public sphere<sup>60</sup>. The political and societal power of the ACFTU must be discussed in the light of the political realities and the regime's strong aspiration in order to promote stability at the labour market. The ACFTU is obliged to balance on the edge of political realities.

### **From a transmission belt to a transition union**

The ACFTU's way has been corporatism and favourable use of the ideological rhetoric claiming the workers to be the masters of the country. In reality this is a fragile platform, depending on the authorities' willingness to admit some space to act. As demonstrated previously, the Government pushed for strengthening the role of the ACFTU and improved labour laws. The State Council distributed a circular calling on local governments to enforce the Trade Union Law and support trade unions in playing their role (ACFTU Bulletin 2005). The Chinese Government made pressure on Wal-Mart's refusal to allow union organisation, which I consider to be of great symbolic importance. Confronting foreign private companies who exploit workers can be objected to only be a façade, but most probably the Chinese Government were pressured by the ACFTU to do this. This does not mean that political and institutional shortcomings are nonexistent, but it is nevertheless important support of increasing the ACFTU's legitimacy inside the system. A major problem the union faces, seems to be local officials, politicians and enterprise management who turn a blind eye to the workers' problems.

According to Clarke it is inappropriate to analyse existing models of trade unionism in transition countries because they cannot choose among societal models provided in existing capitalist societies, but are constrained by structural, institutional and ideological legacies (2005). However, the current situation seems to be that the ACFTU develops faster than the

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<sup>60</sup> Told me by an SMTUC official in March 2005.

scientific theories, and my argument is that the ACFTU combines loyalty to the party and workers' representation in most important and relevant issues. One might argue that the orthodox transmission belt is in a state of flux.

In order to characterise the ACFTU's present function, it is essential to call for a new concept. It is my opinion that the ACFTU has moved from being a subordinated transmission belt to be a *transition union*; the union strives to be an industrial partner despite its formal subordination to the Communist party. The term *transition union* is grounded on my thesis that the ACFTU has increased its influence and its union skills and strength during the period of transition, and is a more representative partner on behalf of organised workers than in the pre-reform period. It is still a weak union body compared to for example Scandinavian unions, but it has established important industrial institutions. The ACFTU has started a process that might end in more autonomous unions in the future. Leaning on reform-friendly ACFTU officials, it makes sense to work for reforms inside the system (LO 2006)<sup>61</sup>.

The ACFTU could also be characterised as a *dialogue partner* because there is a two-way discussion going on with the Government, but this is closer to *societal corporatism*, explored previously. Additionally, the party intervenes in union matters and therefore it is not right to use the term partner because it symbolises cooperation on equal footing, which the relationship not yet corresponds to. However, the ACFTU attempts to act on an equal footing towards the employers and the Government, but not towards the CCP.

Statements from some Western scholars on industrial relations in China differ substantially in how they consider the role and power of the ACFTU. Some scholars say the ACFTU is impotent when it comes to representing workers, and is likely to remain largely nugatory (Metcalf and Li 2005). The same authors allege that the ACFTU's legitimacy is declining. I find this hard to believe since the membership has increased annually with several millions. However, one might argue that the legitimacy is weak. Anita Chan contends that local union branches in foreign Asian-funded<sup>62</sup> enterprises in Guangdong and Fujian provinces are virtually impotent and at worst totally inactive (2006). Howell argues that local level union in the same provinces, Guangdong, is innovative in introducing new measures and ways of extending the reach of the union (2006). Other characteristics of new industrial institutions and legal improvements are that it is nothing but façades (Leung 2002, Metcalf

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<sup>61</sup> Told me by ACFTU officials in a meeting in LO's Faglig Kina-forum, 2006.08.01 in Oslo. However, related to trade unions' influence, they underlined the importance of the distinction between the Communist Party, which they were subordinated to, and other authorities.

<sup>62</sup> It is common that particularly Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese and Korean management are hostile to set up unions.

and Li 2005). Metcalf and Li state that strikes are not permitted. Chan asserts that work stoppage is legal, but complicated (2004). The literature indicates a multifaceted picture, which is probably close to reality.

### **Trade unionism in other East Asian countries**

Authoritarian regimes and weak trade unions in rapid industrialized countries in East Asia have been a common feature. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese industrial relations, it is appropriate to give an overview of the state of trade unions in the neighbouring countries, Vietnam, South Korea and Taiwan.

Compared to Vietnam, the two one-party communist states are developing in quite similar ways, with dramatic changes in their labour markets, employment systems and labour regimes. According to Chan and Nørlund, the Vietnamese government has been more willing than the Chinese to grant Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) some space to defend workers' interests (Chan and Nørlund 1998:173).

South Korea industrialised in the context of capitalism, Confucian cultural tradition, patriarchal ideology and authoritarian state power. One major factor that facilitated the export-oriented industrialisation was the absence of strong organised labour. The political transition to democracy after 1987 brought important changes in the behaviour of the state and capital. Despite a pro-labour activist came to power, harassment of trade unions continued. A new form of trade union repression emerged with enterprises suing trade unions and individual members for damages (Koo 2001:23). The right to strike is heavily restricted and the right to demonstrate is also limited. The authorities can interfere in internal trade union affairs (ICFTU 2004b).

Industrialisation created a large working class in Taiwan. Despite a number of struggles and attempts to organise, a powerful labour movement has not yet emerged. The labour movement developed in the midst of a broad gathering of forces of opposition to the KMT in the 1970s and 1980s (Minns and Tierney 2003). Severe restrictions remain on trade union activity, resulting in a very weak union movement. Many sectors are denied the right to form trade unions at all. The legislation authorities allow the government to interfere directly in the internal affairs of trade unions and there are many restrictions on the right to strike (ICFTU 2004b).

Compared to other countries in Asia, such as Taiwan and South Korea, most probably the ACFTU has more political influence at the national level and in some provinces such as Shanghai. That being said, Chinese workers face considerable problems, private and at work,

as unemployed or laid off. Vietnam could be an example to follow for the ACFTU, but even the VGCL works hard in order to function as a more autonomous trade union. Anyway, it will take years to build strong unions in this region.

### **The ACFTU's environmental policy**

Adequate and comparable research on the ACFTU's environmental policy or activities with that of LO has not been available, if ever conducted. In all likelihood the subject has not been an essential task. Therefore, I have to make my considerations in light of the more general political picture in China, bearing in mind that objections to Mao's policies was almost impossible.

The Mao era was dominated by Mao's massive nature-control experiments or "war against nature", as the environmental expert Judith Shapiro describes it. She states that the environmental dynamics of the period suggest congruence between violence among human beings and violence by humans toward the nonhuman world (Shapiro 2001:1). In particular, the period of the *Great Leap Forward* was catastrophic for both human beings and nature. Shapiro points out the importance of the Chinese phrase *Harmony between the Heavens and Humankind* in China today, and sees this as a reproach to the Maoist slogan *Man Must conquer Nature*. She concludes that the harmony values have not been destroyed "despite Maoism's best efforts to create a radical break with the traditions" (ibid. p. 213).

There were made some attempts to create awareness about the necessity of making China green in poster campaigns the 1970s and 1980s, but the negative environment effects of industrialisation were not addressed (Stefan Landsberger's collection<sup>63</sup>). This is a very important aspect in China, because generally poor acknowledgement and lack of monitoring opposition. However, there is no doubt that the ACFTU focuses on economic growth in order to improve living conditions, and is strongly occupied with OSH, similar to LO's priorities.

One example from my written material shows that the Chinese union elite value environmental efforts as well. A worker that proposed technological upgrading that resulted in the enterprise's coal consumption dropped considerably was praised. However, environmental efforts are only occasionally emphasised.

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<sup>63</sup> Online. Stefan R. Landsberger, sinologist at Leiden University in The Netherlands, has a collection of Chinese propaganda posters available on Internet at: [www.iisg.nl/~landsberger](http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger).

## Summary

The major distinction between the two trade unions is first and foremost related to how they conduct union work. LO belongs to the social democratic tradition and operates in an atmosphere of autonomous unions, a genuine legal industrial framework and proper industrial institutions like collective bargaining and mediation. In contrast, China does not yet have sufficient legal systems that workers benefit from. As we have seen, the revolution aims entailed certain revolutionary constraints as well. The ACFTU strives to adopt a labour market system in an atmosphere of democratic centralism and foreign ownership hostile to setting up unions. LO and the ACFTU share that they both influence political policy-making and take advantages from corporatism. This is politically important and will perhaps form patterns for future relationship on a more equal footing between the ACFTU and the CCP.

The most characteristic feature of the ACFTU is that it has been a subordinated transmission belt and the double identity being both a union and part of the state apparatus. It has been argued that the orthodox transmission belt theory is not appropriate to the ACFTU because it has achieved more autonomy than intended and the concept of *transition union* justifies that the ACFTU increasingly is adapting Western industrial institutions such as local elections, collective bargaining and mediation institutions, and two-way dialogue with the Government and tripartite cooperation.

Another distinction is that the Chinese regime has not yet recognised the conflict between capital and labour, and the lack of genuine industrial institutions and instruments. Recruitment and promotion of union representatives are usually appointed at middle and upper levels in China and elected in Norway. The shop floor level has not been exposed to union activism in China or grassroots' organising.

On an early stage LO was aware of the necessity of environmental involvement, but sufficient attention was not devoted to it. The policy on energy supply divides LO. The examined material from the ACFTU does not use such terms as sustainability, nor does it contain any explicit reference to environmental policy at all. The Mao era was dominated by Mao's massive nature-control experiments or "war against nature". However, there were made some attempts to create awareness about the necessity of making China green, but the negative environmental effects of industrialisation were not addressed.

## 5. PRESENTATION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

*In other parts of the world, people go to the moon. The stars didn't change!*  
(Chinese trade unionist)

In this chapter I present general findings from the enquiry and the examination of written material. The interviews have been conducted to identify behaviour, beliefs and attitudes among shop stewards. In order to expose whether there is any fit between stated political intent and corresponding action I examined policy documents, speeches, annual reports and the trade union magazines. The main topics are environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability, in terms of environmental policy, the working environment and international solidarity. In the introduction I set up some questions to guide me to the core of my thesis and the findings are structured to answer these, and are discussed below. Empirical findings about nature perceptions are presented and discussed in the chapter below.

### **Union's political aims on sustainability**

Question 1: How is sustainability formulated in trade union's political aims?

#### **LO's political aims**

Sustainable development is affected in several chapters in LO's 2001-2004 programme of action. LO stated that the greatest challenge is to ensure that developments take place within a sustainable framework and argued that the exploitation of nature's resources must not exceed nature's critical loads and thus threaten the welfare of future generations. LO stated in broad terms that many of the development features are of such a nature that they may jeopardise nature's critical loads and conclude about the necessity of turning to more sustainable production and consumption (LO 2001a). This ideal notion of sustainable development is in large equivalent to the intentions in the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987).

LO called for the authorities to participate in covering some of the cost of new production processes and developing new and more environmentally friendly production technologies. A main objective is to influence the development in accordance with the trade union values in order to create a strong and efficient counterbalance to international capitalism's cynical treatment of people in parts of the world where they operate without restraint, and therefore LO aim to increase its international involvement.

The contradictions are in the field of energy policy. LO stressed the need to exploit energy sources in terms of energy production and energy use in line with sustainable development in a global perspective. The programme stated that natural gas must be used to a



greater extent for domestic processing and energy use (LO 2001a). It was LO's opinion that "Gas plants built in Norway should be equipped with the market's best available cleaning technologies, in order to ensure cost-efficient emission reductions" (ibid.) The rationale behind LO's policy is to avoid coal and nuclear energy and keep the costs low. Such a policy explains why LO intend to consider energy use in a global perspective. The programme also promoted energy economising and investments in alternative energy. LO's stated aim is as well to increase environmental involvement among its members and to give sustainable development a more prominent position in the organisation (ibid).

LO's policy is self-contradictory: on the one hand they urge sustainable development and environmentally friendly production; on the other they call for polluting gas-fired power plants, although with "best available technology". One might argue that the environmental policy is of double standard. The contradiction in LO's 2001-2004 programme of action make this possible, which is in favour of both sustainability and polluting gas-fired power plants. However, this policy divides LO. Industry in the oil and chemical sectors and engineering still constitutes the hegemonic power in unions' industrial and energy policies, seemingly, ever more at odds with the majority of their members (Byrkjeland 2000).

### **The ACFTU's political aims**

I did not find anything in the ACFTU's material expressed in terms of sustainability or environmental protection. The 2003 Congress report speech about the ACFTU's work was first and foremost a review of the problems emanating from re-construction and economic and social reforms due to the marketisation (Wang 2003). The drive to modernisation is important. Legislative improvements and practical economic and social aid to workers in need are major tasks.

Both the ACFTU and the informants frequently expressed harmonious and scientific development and stressed it was equal to sustainable development, which also Shapiro indicates with reference to the Chinese phrase *Harmony between the Heavens and Humankind* (2001). The dominant view was to pursue economic development in order to make social progress. However, the aim is to promote rationalisation and carry out technical innovation to achieve invigoration and development of enterprises. However, it is difficult to consider whether this is in order to generate more income or a new mode of sustainable production or perhaps both purposes are included. If it were to be interpreted in sustainable manners it has to change the mode of production in that direction.

In the report to the 2003 Congress, ACFTU President Wang Zhaoguo stressed the intellectual economy in terms of science and technology and emphasised the importance of making efforts to upgrade the quality of products, reduce production costs, and increase labour productivity and economic returns (2003). These approaches may lead to less polluting industry and a more environmental friendly production system, due to the fact that old and unsustainable production is a serious problem in China. However, most probably the ACFTU's demands are motivated by economic returns rather than representing a new direction towards sustainable development, but such demands may also result in a more sustainable mode of production.

### **Realisation of the ideal aims**

Question 2: How are the ideal aims realised?

#### **LO**

LO's ideal aims were hard to identify in LO's annual reports that give an account for how they followed up stated policy. Nonetheless, to a certain extent it is taken care of by bureaucratic responses on public hearings and participations in international forum. LO's annual reports indicates that LO followed up its stated policy on gas-fired power plants, considered isolated to other phrases on sustainable development. Efforts in order to achieve other kinds of environmentally friendly energy policies and alternative energy are not noticeable (LO 2001b, 2002d, 2003, 2004a). Whether LO follow up its stated policy on environmentally friendly energy or more generally on sustainability is more doubtful, particularly when global climate problems are recognised as the most serious problem in the same chapter in the 2001-2004 programme (LO 2001a).

LO's annual reports for the period demonstrated that LO invests great efforts in HSE and puts forward proposals on public hearings, and participates in relevant projects with both the state and other organisations (LO 2001b, 2002d, 2003, 2004a). Working conditions and HSE are essential concerns in the trade union magazines that brought up several stories about people facing violence and harassment at work. The general picture is that working conditions have been brutalized and are worse than they were (LO-Aktuelt 2004 No. 5<sup>64</sup>).

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<sup>64</sup> The March edition covered deteriorating working conditions and contained a pamphlet called "The rotten working life" (Det råttne arbeidslivet).

LO's international solidarity is wide-ranging. Financial support for and participation in the training of trade unions in the South is a major part of the work. Information work, the productions of newsletters and pamphlets, and scholarships to journalists are also part of the efforts on solidarity (LO's 2001b, 2002d, 2003, 2004a). A characteristic feature of the magazines is the large number of articles about international affairs, trade unionism in the South, solidarity action and child labour.

LO heeds international organisations and institutions such as the European Union and ILO, in particular in the field of the environment and workplace protection, and participates in ETUC's workshop on sustainable development. LO has taken part in environmental efforts in Russia on clean production and also made efforts in order to stop nuclear waste from Sellafield (*ibid.*).

LO's stated aim is to increase environmental involvement among its members. The first steps have been taken in this respect, illustrated by the fact that sustainable development has been the theme of two major conferences and participation in other conferences on the issue. An environmental award for good practice was handed out in 2001, and in 2002 an internal commission proposed ideas for concerting LO's head quarters into a green office (LO 2001b, LO 2002d). They have an Environmental Forum for discussing issues related to HSE and long-term strategy for its environmental policy, however, the Health, Safety and Environment Forum replaced this in 2003. In 2003, a large amount of the activities were concerned with the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), and LO launched a pamphlet in advance of this event (LO 2003).

The Norwegian magazines do not have any article about the environment (LO-Aktuelt 2003 No. 10, 2004 No. 5, 2004, No. 14). This could of course be accidental, but compared to the findings in the interviews, I believe that the explanation is that neither sustainability nor environmental protection is common tasks in the trade unions day-to-day work, but still remains on the paper. On the other hand, it does not mean that their practise is unsustainable; they just do not talk in those terms, as indicated in the interviews as well.

One could expect that LO, due to its solidarity tradition and the societal role it aims to play, would contribute more in order to pursue sustainable development, as stated in its policy programme. LO admits the necessity of turning to a more sustainable production, but wants to consider emissions in a global perspective and therefore "best available cleaning technology" is acceptable for them. One might argue that this represents a kind of double standard and leaves LO in a defensive position vis-à-vis the environmental movement. The belief that environmental protections are at the expense of jobs might constitute an important

explanation of union's passivity. Additionally, the contradictory policy seems to paralyse LO's achievement in pursuing a sustainable industrial policy. Audun Ruud argues that LO's counterpart, NHO, has been more active in the debate on sustainable industry policy (Ruud 2005). The ProSus report<sup>65</sup> he referred to concludes that LO does not have had sufficient understanding of sustainable industrial policy<sup>66</sup> (Ruud et al. 2005).

When the LO Congress agrees on sustainability, but the leadership have problem to fulfil this intention, the answer may be found in the hegemonic power inside LO. The internal polarities are also expressed through the aversion against *kraftsosialisme* by some of my informants. Subsequently, one may ask if it has been made an internal tacit peace pact between the industrial unions and the rest, and that nobody wants to disturb the order. If it is so, underlying causes might weigh heavily on the misreading of the opportunities that sustainable production generates workplaces. However, the shop stewards' and LO's and the ACFTU's strong belief in technological progress, which constitutes a strategy that attends to generate environmental-friendly jobs, may represent a turn into a new environmental friendly mode of production, but is not yet given priority. Therefore, a tighter collaboration between trade unions and the environmental movement could be important in order to conceptualise sustainable trade union work and promote sustainable practises

The lack of enthusiasm is perhaps a result from the absence of enthusiastic spokesperson in LO, which the former Minister of Environment Thorbjørn Berntsen called for (1999). There are neither any union watchdogs in the public debate. LO's spokespersons rather call for cheaper industrial energy and gas-fired power plants than participate in environmental debates.

In conclusion, one might argue that LO, when it is approaching sustainability from long-term perspectives and global solutions, does not take the responsibility. On the other hand, it is probably the most realistic solution, but the intention of sustainability requires local solutions as well, and in this regard, LO's efforts is not impressing. To a certain degree, one might argue that the environmental critique of unions is deserved because they have not taken a responsible role in the process of achieving sustainability locally. If LO takes its proclaimed policy seriously, another policy is required in order to mobilise both the elites and the rank and file.

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<sup>65</sup> ProSus is Program for Research and Documentation for a Sustainable Society.

<sup>66</sup> LO initiated this report in order to explore the potential for sustainable industrial development. The report provides suggestions on how LO could be more involved.

## The ACFTU

It was hard to find any overall perspective on sustainability in the examination of the ACFTU. The aim to pursue economic development in order to make social progress was well documented in its daily work (Wang 2003, Chinese Trade Unions 2003 No. 2, 2004 No.1 and 3, ACFTU 2005a). However, the harmony approach is central among the Chinese. Leaning towards a rather broad interpretation about the repeated aim of pursuing a harmonious society, derived from the Chinese phrase *Harmony between the Heaven and Humankind*, it might have elements in order to promote sustainable development, but it is not clearly communicated by the ACFTU (Shapiro 2001).

It seems that the ACFTU has made immense efforts in order to improve working conditions, though it does not work satisfactory, yet. Nonetheless, serious problems relating to unsustainable practices and the considerable amount of fatal accidents in certain branches were demonstrated. Chinese workers have problems with the implementation of laws, and there are many players in the field that ignore workers' health in the quest for personal profit (ACFTU 2002).

The ACFTU used the event of the tenth anniversary of China's first Labour Law to place focus on the system of equal consultation, collective contracts, the workers' congress and democratic management in enterprises. The ACFTU advocates laws and regulations frequently and call regularly for mechanisms for mediation, legal aid, arbitration and litigation to help workers in labour disputes, which are often about back pay (Chinese Trade Unions 2003 No. 2, 2004 No.1 and 3).

The ACFTU offer the field of OSH considerable priority. According to a speech by Zhang Chengfu, Director of the Labour Protection Department in the ACFTU, the country was still confronted by a severe situation in safety production with ineffective control over all kinds of dangerous situations<sup>67</sup>. And as the number of occupational injuries increased, so too would the attempts to hide the danger that causes fatal injuries. Concerning occupational hazards, the situation was in the same poor condition. China has about 500 000 mines and factories where the workers are exposed to hazardous substances in workplaces, and 25

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<sup>67</sup> Despite incomplete statistics, it is clear that the number of all kinds of accidents reaches 500 000 every year, road and railway accidents included. China produced one quarter of the world's unprocessed coal, yet the accidents accounted for 60% of the total death toll of miners worldwide.

million workers were involved in hazardous jobs<sup>68</sup>. More crucially, he contended that these occupational hazard issues are not yet on the agenda of the government (2004).

Zhang's examination also demonstrated that there are many players on the field and not all care about occupational protection. He argued that lack of stated policies from the ACFTU and their efforts to follow up was not necessarily the problem, rather political circumstances, and managers and owners that did not have the knowledge or ignored laws and regulations (ibid).

Zhang pointed out some explanations for the severe situation: the policy of "Safety first" had been overlooked, while managers and owners have lacked knowledge of laws and responsibilities and ignored the safety and health of workers. Moreover, investment on safety production had been badly deficient. Inspection was not fully carried out and cases of neglecting laws or loose implementation of the law has happened frequently. Finally, some non-public enterprises had not set up trade unions and consequently failed to carry out any inspection, while in others trade unions did not play a noteworthy role (ibid).

The report from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)<sup>69</sup> demonstrates a wide range of significant legislative shortcomings and problems with unemployed and laid-off workers, the payment of wages, contracts, social insurance and labour disputes. Profit demand and "life-and death" contracts have worsened working conditions. The union delegates at the CPPCC put forward 120 motions to "protect workers' basic rights and interests" including several to ensure basic livelihood for impoverished workers and to narrow the gap between rich and poor by raising taxes. The CPPCC demonstrated that trade unionism is rather weak in many workplaces and shop stewards are afraid of reprisals when they protect workers (Chinese Trade Unions 2003, No.2).

In 2004, the ACFTU conducted a nationwide survey of the workforce in order to "keep themselves updated on worker's living conditions and the country's reality" (Chinese Trade Unions 2004, No.3). Another survey proved that being without a job is one of the greatest fears of the Chinese, with unemployment causing depression and the unemployed feeling a loss of self-esteem (ibid).

The examined report material had little on international work, but covered frequently friendly delegations visiting the ACFTU. The numbers of Chinese union delegations abroad

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<sup>68</sup> Zhang Chengfu stressed that many accidents could be much more serious than reported.

<sup>69</sup> This conference is a forum for discussing major policies concerning economic, cultural and social affairs before the decisions are made of central and local government.

are likely to be considerable. Additionally, the ACFTU participate in several associations in the region and the ILO (Chinese Trade Unions 2003 No. 2, 2004 No.1 and 3). To what extent these trips and conferences address sustainable matters is unknown, but most probably it is not given priority.

One reason behind the ACFTU's lack of environmental policy was explained with the fact that the government was responsible for the environmental policy. However, most informants from the SMTUC admitted that sustainability simply was not put on the agenda, without given any reason for that. In conclusion, the ACFTU's aims must be considered in the light of the Dickensian realities in great parts of the Chinese world of work. Since I cannot identify any debate on sustainability, one might argue that the ACFTU has a defensive position up against the growing environmental debate in China.

### **Attitudes, beliefs, opinions and environmental behavior**

Questions 3: What are the attitudes, beliefs, opinions and environmental behaviour among shop stewards? In addition to environmental behaviour, the underlying themes in this paragraph are quality of life and union's image and role.

### **Environmental behavior and life styles**

In both Oslo and Shanghai, typical trade unionist behaviour is fairly environmentally friendly: trade unionists do not have cars, some do not even have a driving licence, they bike or use public transportation to work, they sort their waste, they are in favour of green taxes, they are willing to change their consumption behaviour, and they do not hunt or use rare species. They neither participate in public environmental debates nor are members of green NGOs.

There were reservations expressed about environmental behaviour, however. The Norwegians in particular wondered what green taxes paid for and put forward ideas on how green taxes should be used, suggesting for example, that it should not be the same price for heating garage as for heating living quarters. Some believed that green taxes should be earmarked for environmental purposes only. At present, the shop stewards sort waste in accordance with what the public service provides, but they were willing to do more. They said they would change their habits if it made any sense and the government actually treated waste properly. However, I did not find any creativity with regards to how they could contribute to improving the environment themselves. They felt they could do only a little, with one informant warning against the privatisation of environmental problems. All supported green

events like the Green Beijing Olympics, but the Norwegians in particular were sceptical to such arrangements since they believed they boosted mass consumption and did not attack the causes of un-sustainability. The Chinese believed that such events were positive because they combined both development and environmental protection. Media was the main source of information about environmental issues, but unions and the workplace played a role as well in distributing knowledge and attitudes.

They dream about travelling to other parts of the world for holidays, but only the Norwegians can afford it because the Chinese do not have the income, and holidays rarely last for periods of more than 3 days. For the weekends, outings and fishing are important, but only feasible to the Norwegians, because there are not many green landscapes or clean rivers left for fishing in Shanghai. In Shanghai, they dream about going into the fields and the mountains, the peace and quiet, and fishing and hunting when they are retired. Realistically, it is more likely to be an option for the next generation. The urban parks are popular substitutes for nature to do exercise, Chinese shadow boxing, taiji, or football.

It is noteworthy that shop stewards seem to be more aware of environmental matters as individual citizens than in the role of trade unionists since they did not turn environmental concerns into union work. The resemblances in environmental behaviour are striking. Urbanism and similar social background is maybe one explanation.

### **Quality of life**

In terms of such existential values as quality of life, both material and spiritual aspects were important: Coping with life and coping with more than the daily expenditures were major aspects. Harmonious family life along with job security and a stable income were most important. The Chinese placed more emphasis than the Norwegians on harmonious families, a lifestyle of helping each other and taking care of elderly people: "Family relations are the symbol of quality of life" (CM54) "A happy family is a happy life" (CM59). The Norwegians, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on the ability to do what they wanted to do and travelling and adventure were important aspects of a satisfactory life. The Chinese academics emphasised career and fortune as well as cultural events as important aspects of a satisfactory life.

Most of the informants expressed satisfaction with their urban material living conditions and how they live, even among the skyscrapers in Shanghai. Some have found their quiet oases close to the busy and noisy city centre. Some, in particular the women, would like to have a terraced or low-rise house or a villa with a garden and flowers. Because



of urban property prices, a balcony is the closest they will come to realising their dreams. Urban life seems to be highly gratifying so long as you have access to greenery. From this, one may argue that the aspirations in order to have a satisfactory life are quite modest. It is no luxurious desire, and stable incomes seem to be more important than significant increase of wages. In conclusion, the findings resemble with regard to values in terms of lifestyle and aspirations to achieve a satisfactory life.

Peter Coates argues that the proletarian struggle aimed to catch up with the bourgeoisie's standard of living, the desirability of increased production and consumption and he blames Marxists for having agreed with their capitalist opponents, in the conception of nature as a bottomless storehouse. He explains this with the belief in progress (1998). This is close to Helge Hvid and Henrik Lambrecht Lund who blames the unions for having supported companies and industries in maintaining the status quo when threatened by environmental demands (2002). One might object to the analyses that the entire world believed in industrial progress until the first cry of environmental concern was commonly recognised. I agree in that unions should have acted more proactively. However, Coates attacks the whole system of production and mass consumption, in which the unions constitute the minor part. In a society where most people are employees, the wage system is fundamental in order to achieve quality of living for the rank and file. This has been an important political task as well.

My informants were concerned about coping with life and coping with more than the daily expenditures. They had no luxurious desires. A harmonious family life along with job security and a stable income were most important. The Norwegians were positive to the question of whether sustainable production should be part of collective bargaining. They believed that the bargaining system could include considerably more social benefits at the cost of income. However, the wage system is closely linked to price and finance policy and cannot be seen as isolated. On the other hand, one could appeal or moralise to workers in order to reduce the over consumption, but that would be a privatisation of the problem that I fear would have a marginal influence on the totality. Collective action is preferable. Both LO and the ACFTU call for a new world order, which I interpret to be an inclination of taming capitalism, who they denote is to blame for most of the environmental problems.

### **Union's image and role**

Whether trade unions should be more involved in environmental matters, the attitude was positive, even though not all believed it would revitalise LO or increase trade union recruitment. The view of most informants was that LO should improve its environmental

reputation. A few made reference to the traditional image of LO<sup>70</sup> with the interviewees stressing that this image had to be changed.

Those who believed that LO should do more referred to its role as an opinion former, and stated that it should do more to influence peoples' attitudes. Other warned that if LO did not participate in environmental debates, others would define what the problem was. Most were positive to cooperation with green NGOs, but stressed that these should act according to the laws.

The Shanghai informants did not communicate specific views on this topic. The Chinese unionists stressed that their urgent aim was to protect workers, with the primary concern being basic living conditions.

The answers must be seen in light of the fact that there is little discussion of the environment at the workplace, which perhaps make it difficult to imagine concrete action and consequences of increased involvement.

## **Environmental protection and sustainability**

Question 4: How are environmental protection and sustainable development understood by shop stewards and the trade unions? In this section, I firstly place emphasis on main viewpoints on the present topic respectively in LO, the ACFTU and among the shop stewards. Underlying themes are opinions about environmental problems and the working environment, basically HSE, or OSH in Chinese terms, and poverty. Ultimately, trade union's presupposed involvement in Agenda 21, which was not followed up, is briefly discussed.

## **Trade unions' understanding of environmental protection and sustainability**

LO believes that a globalised economy and unlimited free trade and growth causes mass poverty, social misery and destroys the environment. LO points out that the greatest environmental challenges are global and must be solved by way of decisions that are binding on the individual nations. LO's perception of sustainable development is intrinsically linked with sustainable growth and stresses that man depends on nature, on clean air, clean water and healthy food and state that a good environment is of decisive importance for social and economic developments. Global climate problems are recognised as most serious.

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<sup>70</sup> Meaning *kraftsosialisme*, also called industrial modernisation pushing energy intensive export industry after World War II (Byrkjeland 2000:257), a term that relates back to the 1970s and the discussion on the expansion of hydropower and environmental preservation

LO makes clear that they have a welfare approach to sustainability and the overall policy is to unite environment, employment and welfare (LO 2001a). An environmental approach could intensify LO's efforts in order to achieve a new sustainable mode of production and it would highlight LO's environmental challenges in a more effective way than today. With relation to green taxes, there is one distinction between LO and its shop stewards. The latter group wondered what green taxes pay for and suggested it should be earmarked for environmental purposes. In contrast, LO did not support one-sided taxes that could harm competitiveness and profitability (2001a). This is not necessarily in opposition, but displays different approaches, and underlines that LO first and foremost is an economic actor (Hyman 2001).

The ACFTU's main concern is to advance economic development and social progress and place emphasis on employment in order to secure basic livelihood for workers, which I have discussed previously.

## **Agenda 21**

Agenda 21 intended to engage unions because they were considered to be vital actors in facilitating sustainable development. This was not successfully followed up. I found nothing about it in the ACFTU material while LO has taken a few initiatives. None of my informants knew for sure what Agenda 21 or the 1992 Rio Conference was about. Only a few recognised the term and related it to the United Nations or environmental issues. My investigation indicates that neither LO nor the ACFTU are engaged in A21 as intended. LO aim to be active in one phrase in the 2001-2004 programme of action, and the 2004 annual report shows that one project on sustainable business was initiated in cooperation with ProSus<sup>71</sup> (LO 2004). In the ACFTU material, there was nothing at all about Chinese A21.

According to the Norwegian special report to the UN General Assembly Special Session on the follow up of Norwegian A21 five years after the Rio Conference, every sector of the trade union movement was to help to spur on the efforts of enterprises and local communities. LO was also to use its strong political position in Norway to demand a better environmental policy (MoE 1996-97). These ideal aims have not been realised. The paper also stated that safety representatives must be given a legal right to intervene in matters connected with the outdoor environment, which is not yet permitted.

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<sup>71</sup> Program for Research and Documentation for a Sustainable Society

It is easy to say that somebody has not done his or her job, but it is more difficult to identify the responsibility. As we have seen, neither Norway nor China has sufficiently followed up the intention from the Rio conference in order to involve trade unions, except for a period in Norway after the Rio Conference took place. It is not necessarily important to be familiar with the term of Agenda 21, but the findings reveal the state of the environmental and sustainable engagement in general is poor. The challenge is how to generate further initiatives and trade union awareness. These findings ought to be a reminder for environmental authorities and academic circles as well.

### **Shop stewards' opinions about environmental problems**

In both Oslo and Shanghai, most informants mentioned polluted air as the major problem, with the majority pointing out the large amount of private cars as being the major cause. At a national level, Norwegians considered industrial emissions and energy waste to be serious environmental problems, whereas in Shanghai, they also considered the quality of water as being a major problem. Nationally, the Chinese were concerned about the shortage of water reserves, as well as air pollution, overpopulation, ravaged natural resources, the amount of poor, and food shortages. A major concern was the un-developed<sup>72</sup> country and poor mentality toward environmental matters. In addition to concerns about water and air, climate change, and the green house effect, global problems were identified being everything from nuclear weapons, as one Shanghai informant said, to terrorism, capitalism and poverty in the eyes of Oslo informants.

Most Norwegians pointed out that the Government should do more to promote environmentally friendly industrial production, in order to raise funds and invest in cleaning technology. This is on line with LO's and the ACFTU's strategies as well. When focusing on environmental protection related to economic growth, the criticism of governments' unbalanced development was more marked. With regard to evaluating governments' environmental efforts, criticism was not too great, even though the view of the majority was that they did not do enough, and pointed out public transportation, the use of renewable energy and ensuring of common right of access<sup>73</sup> as examples of issues that the government should care more about.

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<sup>72</sup> One may argue whether China is un-developed. Some parts are, but I prefer to label it a developing country. However, some of the Chinese respondents meant it is un-developed and therefore the latter term is used here, and most probably they had the countryside in mind.

<sup>73</sup> In Norwegian *allemannsretten*

In conclusion, it is striking that polluted air and the large amount of private cars as being the major problem, was considered in same ways in Oslo and Shanghai. This can be explained by the fact that the vast part of polluting industries is moved out of both cities, but it makes even more difficult to understand why trade unionists do not transfer their concerns into trade union work.

### **The working environment**

LO characterised the working environment by insecurity and poor working conditions, severe personal conflicts, bullying, harassment, violence and threats at work. Psychological and physical strain and injuries are considerable, and an increasing number of people experience burnout long before they reach pensionable age. Therefore LO called for a new labour law.

The Norwegian findings indicate that the working environment and brutalised working conditions are major problems, and causes psychosocial problems. In concrete terms, the problems are characterised as follows: overlong working hours, overtime, low wages, social dumping, insecurity, stress and pressure leading to exhaustion, wear and tear, as well as noise and heat in the industrial sector, and bullying and harassment in the service sector. Informants draw the following conclusions: "Working conditions make people ill. The working environment is a threat to peoples' quality of life. This hurts women in particular" (NM41), and "Effectiveness and profit demand makes people ill" (NF38).

The Chinese mentioned the following problems: overtime, lack of pensions, low wages, worker protection, and injuries and accidents, in particular in the construction industry. It should be pointed out that this gives no adequate picture of Chinese working conditions, but rather reflects the result of the interviews. The examination of the magazines demonstrates dramatic situations confronting many Chinese workers, the temporarily redundant, the unemployed and pensioners. To be unemployed is the greatest fear in China today. The ACFTU's major strategy is in this sphere of ensuring legitimate rights for workers. Supervision, inspection and control mechanism at workplaces are of particular importance (Chinese Trade Unions 2003 No.2, 2004 No.1 and 3).

In conclusion, the Chinese working environment is substantially more brutal than the Norwegian, with serious injuries and accidents. Psychosocial problems were serious problems in Norway; in contrast, the Chinese workplaces are dangerous in physical terms. Despite the standards of Norwegian working conditions are much higher than in China, improvements will most probably be considered by the affected workers to be in accordance with the

concept of sustainable development The field of working environment was most congruent in my findings: both the trade unions and the shop stewards agreed on the analysis of problems, and the prioritising. It was the main task in trade union magazines as well.

## **Poverty**

LO's vision is a more equitable society and work for all is job number one. I interpret the underlying principle to be that work and income help people out of poverty, which is important in order to, achieve a more equitable society. In LO's international perspective it is important to contribute to equitable international trade, which is further strengthened in the demand of a new world order based on solidarity to ensure a more equitable distribution between the rich and the poor (LO 2001a). The ACFTU supported the workers and people in all countries in their just struggles, which I interpret to be a matter of poverty and more equal distribution as well (Wang 2003).

Among the interviewees, poverty reduction was considered to be most important for achieving a sustainable future: as a matter of fair and equal distribution. The imbalance between South and North was stressed among the Norwegians. As one informant expressed: "We must stop the transfer of problems to the poor" and "We must stand together in the fight against poverty" (NM46a), one said (...) "we must distribute the abundance to the poor" (NF38), and another "They (the poor) need an alternative to famine, hunger and death". The Norwegians considered poverty as an *out there* problem, mainly in the South-North context, though none mentioned poor people and poverty in Norway.

Several were convinced that poverty causes and compounds environmental problems, and that combating poverty would give the poor new options (meaning more environmentally friendly lifestyles):

"Yes, that's what sustainable development is about. Poor people will use the resources available, even if it harms the environment. We should increase welfare, not consumption. The whole world should prioritise that, the distribution of health and wealth" (NM46b).

One focused on capitalism as the major problem on the question of whether poverty reduction is part of sustainable development:

Absolutely, capitalism claims growth or collapse. Growth is the same as exploiting nature. We must reduce consumerism in the Western countries to increase living standards in poor

countries. Such decisions are not popular and therefore the politicians do not dare to do what's important. (NM40)

Another emphasised the countries' political options: "Yes, poverty reduction makes countries perform sustainable politics. Poverty reduction is good because sustainability is expensive" (NF29).

The Chinese believed poverty to be a major explanation for unsustainable practices in China: poor provinces, poor communities and poor and small businesses with outdated and pollutant production equipment on the one hand, and poor people starving without any alternative on the other. Poor people lack knowledge about the environmental and health-related consequences: "Our country is undeveloped. In some areas they do not ask this question at all. It is the mentality in poor areas" and "Food is the first thing" (CM42). They explained, and had experienced themselves, how industrial plants destroyed the basis of existence: "Before, we picked up everything from nature, today there is nothing to pick up" (CM42). Another put it this way with relation to a factory polluting water: "All the inhabitants have to drink from it. They do not know about the pollution. They need the jobs to survive" (CF43). There was also one who understood sustainable development as a means of reducing the waste of natural resources (CF39).

The ACFTU's main focus is on economic development. It is reasonable as far as poverty is considered to be the major problem, often caused by high rate of unemployment and unpaid wages and pensions. On the other hand, by ignoring environmental problems and the need of sustainable solutions, workers will remain victimised and pay the price for it in the long run.

## **Economic growth versus sustainable development**

Question 5: How do trade unionists think about economic growth versus sustainable development? The need of a new mode of production and the scepticism to mass consumptions is already accounted for above.

## **Economic growth**

The interviewees expressed scepticism to capitalist driven growth and mass consumerism. In particular, the global perspective was to reduce consumerism in the West and increase the living standards in poor countries. They want to improve their living standards, but not to the

detriment of environmental protections. The Chinese also emphasised the importance of economic growth: "If we do not have any development, we cannot reduce poverty either" and (...) "sustainable development is to reduce poverty" (CM58). The Chinese stressed that reducing poverty entails that economic growth and development is sustainable, but as one said, it is easy to talk, but more difficult to choose between reducing poverty and rapid economic development (CF43). Another said she was more relaxed because the Government had announced the slowing down of the rapid economic growth (CF47).

All the Norwegian informants agreed that collective bargaining contributed to sustainable development, but ambiguity lay in the preconditions that some harnessed to such a view. The overwhelming view was that there was no contradiction between sustainable development and trade unions' economic demands, because the benefit goes either to the owners or to the workers. However, it was stressed that negotiation should first and foremost aim at distribution of income. Several had the view that owners already took excessive profit from the enterprises. One pointed out that if increased wages were only about increased consumption, this was bad. As one put it: "Salaries must be adjusted to prices. You work for the money, we need income to pay for living" (NF38). Another pronounced her view in this way:

People must feel justice inside the country. The Norwegian idea of equality is important. Dissatisfied people are not sustainable. We are human beings: this is not only about production. (NF61)

It has to be noted that LO's pay claims for a long while has been moderate in terms of equal distribution, given priority to low paid workers and joint responsibility for national competitiveness. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the Chinese informants considered economic growth as a mean to reduce poverty to be matter of sustainability, which underline that the concept has to be considered relatively (Langhelle 1998).

### **Sustainable bargaining**

The Norwegians were positive to whether sustainable production should be part of collective bargaining, but believed it would be relevant only in a long-term perspective, due to the fear that it would jeopardise jobs in the short term. As one said "If the negotiators are thinking of their grandchildren's need for a job in the future, it is possible" (NM40). One put it like this: "No, we would have to change political life in Norway. NHO and the employers would never accept it" (NF61). The youngest agreed that owners would be unwilling to incur large



economic costs for the sake of it, and also underlined the polarities in view on the matter inside LO, while another said that other channels should stop pollution. On the other hand, some expressed the view that such issues as HSE were already part of the bargaining, but that this did not extend to the outer environment. Others stressed the safety representatives' role and influence. One pointed out the term sustainability was not used in this context:

Concerns about the environment are rather more indirect even though we want clean production systems, but we seldom argue with environmental causes. We support non-polluting gas-fired power, but our concerns about work places are given the major priority. (NM52)

Another said proper working conditions increased employees' trust in the management, which in turn made them more willing to accept changes. Others stressed the global perspective of income distribution.

The Chinese admitted that they did not have great experience in collective bargaining or other kinds of negotiations. They said trade unions had a weak position on these matters and had to develop the content of negotiations. They also said they needed more knowledge. In Baosteel, they had introduced negotiation, and had agreed with the management to take the slow road to sustainable production.

Questions relating to trade unionism in the future and the prioritisation of tasks were clearly difficult to understand and answer for the Chinese informants; it was simply too removed from their way of thinking. In the talks I had with high-level officials and elected officers, they were open minded to this new way of thinking and told me enthusiastically and repeatedly about the importance of trade unions focusing on environmental protection and sustainable development<sup>74</sup>. In conclusion, the positive attitude to sustainable collective bargaining among the Norwegians is quite important and reveals a potential for the future. However, this presupposes that LO has the will to realize it.

It was said that the benefit goes either to the owners or to the workers and the latter group could likely take their part of it. There are other alternatives as well, the benefit could for example be used to environmental reinvestment. Sustainable bargaining could be realised

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<sup>74</sup> In my final meeting with Chinese trade unionists in September 2005, they told about administrative change in Shanghai Municipality that resulted in a new design of a trade union called 'Environmental protection trade union', covering cleaners and those who were employed with greenery. They also told me about a trade union statement that put more emphasis to sustainable development.

in several ways, for example in a new mode of sustainable production and demanding social benefits instead of increased income.

### **Potential to advance sustainability?**

Question 6: Does any potential exist for trade unions to advance sustainable practices and activities?

LO has a stated policy in sustainable development that unites the environment, employment and welfare and says the administration of nature's resources shall be in line with sustainable development. The shop stewards support this and several goes even longer and see sustainability as part of collective bargaining in the future. Parts of HSE are already included in collective bargaining in Norway today. The agreement on an Inclusive Workplace (IW) is a cooperation and dialogue between the social partners<sup>75</sup>. Both the ACFTU and the informants frequently expressed harmonious and scientific development and the latter group meant it represented matters of sustainability. The Chinese shop stewards were open-minded, but had poor experience in combining sustainable matters in union work. Most probably, it will be a matter of time before the ACFTU puts sustainable development and environmental protection on the agenda, due to the serious problems and increasing environmental debate in China. Trade unions have the potential to be a learning environment for sustainability. Therefore, I believe trade unions have a potential to advance sustainability. The main challenge is to integrate environmental perspectives into the economic development strategy. The shop stewards should transfer their environmental behaviour and demands into trade union work.

If LO and the ACFTU want to advance sustainable practises, they have great support among the shop stewards. The environmental behaviours and opinions in the findings were on the individual level, but represent a vital source if LO decides to mobilise its members in order to pursue sustainable development. LO have all the opportunities to appear as pro-active and offensive in the environmental discourse. It has not been possible to identify any debate about environmental issues inside the ACFTU.

A further collaboration between LO and the ACFTU that put sustainability on the agenda, will probably put pressure on both parties. LO and its members have competence that easily could help the ACFTU to pursue sustainable modes of production. It also might

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<sup>75</sup> The social partners and the government entered into an agreement on IW. The idea behind the concept is to make room for every individual who wants to and is able to work (Trygdeetaten online, LO 2005b)

increase LO's environmental awareness in order to clarify its own dual policy and pursue sustainability itself

### **Potential tasks for collaboration**

The sense of solidarity was strong among my respondents and in LO's written material, and seems to be strongest expressed towards the situation in South. The ACFTU considers itself to be receiver of solidarity from abroad in terms of trade union skills and union experiences from market economy. This constitutes the opportunity and potential for placing sustainability on the union agenda.

Along with the growing economy, energy demand and population of China, older and less sustainable production represents a major problem. Cleaner production is given priority in the Chinese Agenda 21. Norway has huge energy-intensive industries and experiences with establishing more sustainable production processes and the environmental technology has developed into a separate industry. Norway has strict health and safety standards as well. Trade unions participate in these processes, and have skills and competence. Environmental management and OSH could be a trade union area of cooperation as well. The ACFTU evolves, and LO wants to give input. Local Norwegian unions in companies that are established in China like Norske Skog and Mustad, have excellent opportunities to contribute to more sustainable mode of production in China.

### **Trade unions' environmental dilemma**

LO's policy on gas-fired power plants without cleaning technology is grounded on a fear of loosing jobs, which makes polluting energy and job creation on the expense of the environment, acceptable for trade unionist. LO's environmental dilemma is reflected in my findings from the interviews as well: If workplaces are threatened, the shop stewards were willing to give up environmental concerns. LO's representatives placed emphasis on energy supply and low prices, and even pollutant gas-fired power plants, in order to generate jobs. Traditional industry is based on natural resources, and the energy intensive industry is often located in rural communities with limited alternative employment opportunities. Therefore, some trade unionists interpret support of polluting industry to be a matter of solidarity with affected workers, and others stressed that the pollution had to be serious in order to justify the consequences for the workers as well as the local community. On the other hand, they believed that pollution controls and standard production procedures should be intensified.

Only those from Baosteel and Putuo districts agreed to closing down factories. One Norwegian highlighted that the question itself was wrong, and that one should ask what could be done before it came to such a situation. A common view was that new workplaces free of pollution should be established, and most argued for the upgrading of machinery, technical improvements and cleaning processes, and that the authorities should regulate more, and offer more financial support.

From the unionists' perspective, closing of a factory means in most cases taking job security from a member and this manner of solidarity with workers partly explains why workers join trade unions. One might object these views with reference to the social security system that replaces loss of income, and that people can move to other places, and that new jobs will be created in other branches. Nevertheless, the insecurity people experience explains why closing down factories is so strongly combated by the unions.

Another angle is union membership. Workers join trade unions for the reason that unions have something to offer; better wages, employment terms and working conditions, job security, protection and a feeling of self-respect (Boeri et al. 2001:17). As we see workers join the unions from practical and ideological reasons aiming to benefit from its achievements. For that reason the local representatives maybe favour politics that benefit their re-election chances (ibid. p. 21). These motivations set the agenda in trade union work and the representatives have to follow up members' aspirations. If the members do not call for sustainable practices and environmental-friendly policies, the union representatives do not have the pressure to focus on such topics. Nevertheless, an important dilemma is how to protect the environment without too negative social and economical consequences, individually and societal. It is demanding when the different dimensions of sustainability appear to be in opposition to each other. On the other hand, LO has not devoted satisfactory attention on how to deal with sustainability in union work, which may explain why it has not seriously discussed its own dilemma related to environmental protection and sustainability.

### **What is sustainability?**

The findings raise two fundamental questions: (i) what does it mean to be in accordance with the eco system and (ii) how to determine what is sustainable economic and social improvements and what is not?

To answer the first question, the generational perspective in the Brundtland Report is an important guide. Ideally, one has to rely on a combination of scientific knowledge and

local experiences. Sustainable development is basically about how the planet and its ecological system shall survive. In a few words it is about the flora and fauna, bio-diversity, clean air, water and soil and that the whole ecological system shall be intact for future generations. In concrete terms it is better to bike than use private cars, and renewable energy is better than fossil fuel. Sustainability is about conservation, and standards for environmental management. The difficulties lie in all the varieties of beliefs and opinions, to which I return in the next chapter.

With regard to my second question, it theoretically is impossible to determine the degree of sustainability on a general basis. For that reason, Lafferty's approaches to consider sustainability as having "openness of meaning" and being a direction of progress makes sense (1999). The nature and extent of sustainability is heavily dependent on place. For example, in the case of Norway and China, where industrial and technological standards vary as does the state of social progress. To pursue basic living standards for poor people has to be considered to be sustainable social development. But it also generates other implications due to the increase of purchasing power and consumption, which in turn creates further pressure on the environment. On the other hand, energy resources such as natural gas are preferable to heavily polluting coal in China. In contrast, natural gas is considered to be problematic in Norway due to its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as measured against other renewable energy sources. Such aspects have been important to LO's stance on gas-fired power plants.

LO has traditionally fronted energy supply for industrial purposes in order to pursue employment, and this partly explains its contradictory views on environmental matters. LO's former president Gerd-Liv Valla asserts that the national gas is better than imported coal and nuclear power (Dagsavisen 06.10.07). The question about gas-fired power plants and cleaning technology is complex compared to energy import as far as Norway has international obligations to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emission. If LO had placed more emphasis on alternative energy, and generally had been more engaged with environmental matters, its policy might have been less controversial. There is anyway no logic in labelling polluting gas plants as environmentally sustainable, particularly not due to the obligation to act environment-friendly on a local basis.

One might argue that relative considerations related to time and place and stage of development are acceptable in order to measure or determine what is sustainable and what is not, for example in North South issues (Langhelle 1998). To consider alternatives are likewise of relevance, and if there is an alternative, one has to consider what is most eco efficient (Lafferty 2002). However, there must not be any excuse for exercising double standards of

morality between developed and developing countries. However, there simply are no clear answers to my two questions above.

## **Summary**

Regarding to both confederations, it was hard to identify how they dealt with sustainable development in day-to-day union work. One might argue that LO's analysis on sustainability in many aspects is consistent with that of the Brundtland Report and in large merging with the recommendation. However, LO seem to be reluctant in following up, and the lack of intended engagement and activities are obvious. This is most probably related to the contradictions in LO's policy related to the policy on polluting gas-fired power plants. One might argue that this represents a kind of double standard and leaves LO in a defensive position vis-à-vis the environmental movement and paralyse LO's achievement in pursuing a sustainable industrial policy.

The ACFTU promotes social and economic sustainability in order to secure basic living conditions. However, the findings indicate that the merger between environmental preservation and economic growth is missing. The main union tasks are job creation, wages and working conditions. With some prerequisites, these tasks concern sustainability, but is not necessarily linked to the intention about sustainable development as a new concept of economic growth.

In my findings, both individual shop stewards and LO agreed in the principle idea underlying the notion of sustainability, meaning utilisation must be on accord with the ecological system. The interviewees were concerned about un-sustainable development and exploitation of nature, but if the workplaces are threatened, the shop stewards were willing to give up environmental concerns.

In conclusion, the concept of sustainable development has to be more strictly defined and conceptualised in union work. LO's own policy reflects that of the UN, but they do not turn their principal ideas into day-to-day union work. I did not, however, find any policy or statements at all with regard to the ACFTU. The findings did not reveal any working class desire of a luxury life, but coping with the daily expenditures was considered to be most important. The Norwegian shop stewards were positive to whether sustainable production should be part of the collective bargaining system.

## 6. PERCEPTIONS AND CONSTRUCTS OF NATURE

*Rivers and mountains may change; human nature, never*  
(Chinese proverb)

In order to solve present environmental problems, a change of our attitudes towards nature is required. Perceptions of nature are vital aspects of the cultural approach to nature. In this chapter, I begin by taking a brief look at traditional perceptions of nature. Secondly, I introduce the idea of *A global ideology of nature*, which represents a newer concept. Finally, I bring in cultural constructions of nature, and nature symbols employed by trade unions. Perceptions of nature may enlighten the variety of notions of sustainability and therefore I provide a few examples of ways of constructing nature.

One has to be familiar with the baggage of history that influences one's minds in order to understand attitudes of today. This might inform us of whether there are significant disparities and similarities between Norway and China as well. However, due to the dissimilarities in history, culture, and size, I have placed emphasis on likeness. An exploration of the national context has been particularly important, as I have limited access to Chinese unions' cultural symbols due to my lack of Chinese language skills.

### **Perceptions of nature**

Perceptions of nature derive from traditions and myths as well as ancient wisdom and modern science. Consequently, understandings of nature are much more than the conception of nature as a physical place. Nature is also the collective phenomena of the world or universe: nature is an essence: it is an inspiration and guide for people and source of authority governing human affairs. Finally, nature is the conceptual opposite of culture. Coates alleges that man has not made the natural world, but has, in a sense, created nature (1998:3). He points out that nature in the Western world has been a source of wealth and amusement for aristocrats and royalty, particularly through hunting, and a fountain of joy, beauty, solace and inspiration for poets. To the majority of people, it has been a challenge to surmount, and a set of raw materials out of which to wrestle a living (ibid. p. 10). The latter group I presume applies to the working class, to which I return below.

People transferred feelings to nature and believed they were free by nature. Nature was seen as a liberating principle of right and good (ibid. pp.127, 135). The search for freedom in nature was an escape from the constraints of civilisation (Horigan 1988). Labour culture has

in many aspects been created in opposition to the bourgeois, yet freedom is frequently symbolised in nature constructions. Workers might add their own and different values to it.

The values of a balanced relationship between man and nature, conservation and environmental protection have a long history in Norway. The first attempt to control fishing and hunting dates back to 1276. Medieval Norway was overpopulated up until the Black Death, which resulted in over-exploitation of natural resources. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the population had doubled, which for a second time put pressure on natural resources, so the resource management of forests and water was introduced. The development of water-powered sawmills and mining represent the first conflicts between new technology and nature. Bredo Berntsen characterises the pioneering resource management as protecting natural resources for long-term utilitarian use. In 1902, the first demand for the conservation of national parks was made. The popularity of and modern outdoor recreation<sup>76</sup> such as sport fishing, hunting, and mountain climbing was in fact inspired by British tourists in the 1820s (1994:282-283). Another important feature of the Norwegian culture is ensuring common right of access<sup>77</sup>. The egalitarian aspect, whereby nature is for everyone, has been vital in Norway.

Nina Witoszek asks how the old Nordic perception of humans as violent players in the theatre of honour and revenge and the nature images and values attached to them, has mutated to the modern Næssian<sup>78</sup> insistence on the cosmic humility of mankind? (2003:187-188). She points out the disappearance of the aristocracy as a social group as one explanation. Witoszek introduces two contrasting views of nature: “One heroic, that stresses the beauty of violence and destruction and the sublimity of passion, and the other ecological that emphasises survival, balance and self-preservation”. Another point she puts forward is that the ecological strain in Norse literature established a durable pragmatic myth of nature that prevented significant influence by Romanticism. One conclusion is that the Norwegians embraced nature, God and reality and she describes the ideology in the period of nation-building eco-humanism; “a cosmology based on humanist ideals, but one in which the symbolic referents of identity derive from nature imagery and from a particular allegiance to place” (ibid. p.197).

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<sup>76</sup> It does not exist an adequate English translation of the Norwegian term *friluftsliv*, but usually, outdoor recreation is used as an English equivalent.

<sup>77</sup> In Norwegian *allemannsretten*

<sup>78</sup> The philosopher Arne Næss introduced the philosophy of Deep ecology.



As we will see in the following, there are some culturally constructed similarities in Norway and China.

Through more than three thousand years, the Chinese refashioned China. Mark Elvin underlines that China's long-term history - social, economic, political and intellectual - has been interwoven from the start with its environment, and that the Chinese environment is entwined with anthropogenic forces. Non-renewable resources were consumed and renewable resources exploited faster than was sustainable in ancient cities and warrior-dominated empires and societies. Elvin stresses that there was no single set of attitudes towards nature that could legitimately be called *Chinese*, and he argues that we need to be wary of searching too hard for inspiration from pre-modern China in the present troubles (1998:1, 2004:321). Bearing this warning in mind, I provide some fundamental aspects of Chinese perceptions.

Chinese cultural history and perceptions of nature must be measured in light of three elements: the ruling system with emperor: Confucian and Taoist thoughts: and the theories of yin and yang. The legitimacy of the Chinese emperor was the belief that he was the *Son of Heaven* and consequently the Chinese dynasties had their *Mandate of Heaven* (Wang 2002:6-7). Confucianism and Taoism are seen as complementary and reflect the fundamental belief of the Chinese perception that the universe is not made up of opposites that are in conflict, but opposites that are necessary to each other, such as yin and yang and male and female.

Orthodox Confucianism was concerned about the physical universe of nature. This led to a lack of interest in looking at clues in nature as to how people might live better; even though it did not prevent Confucians from trying to dominate nature. Conversely, Taoism paid great attention to nature and how to live in accordance with nature. Human beings were considered to be part of nature, and the world was seen as a product of non-making, not created by any God that laid down laws from above (Ferkiss 1993:139-140). In the light of Mao's extreme relations with nature, Shapiro reminds us that attempts to tame and reshape nature in the West have been a central part of the modern project since the Enlightenment (2001).

Witoszek senses the moral of Askeladden<sup>79</sup> as a Norwegian version of Tao. She contends that the underlying principle of Askeladden's behaviour is action in accordance with the laws of nature. Witoszek also detects Askeladdian elements in the thoughts of deep ecology philosopher Arne Næss (2003:197,2004). Askeladden is pragmatic and plebeian,

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<sup>79</sup> The cultural hero in the folk tale of Espen Askeladd, a peasant wastrel who gets the princess and half of the kingdom by doing nothing but showing compassion towards nature. See Asbjørnsen og Moe: Norske folkeeventyr II, Per, Pål og Espen Askeladd.

neither romantic nor idealistic. Bearing in mind the thoughts of Witoszek, there might not be such great dissimilarities between Norwegian and Chinese perceptions of nature, after all.

Witoszek argues that nature influences Norwegian identity: A tradition of nature adventure and nature images colours peoples' ethical and political tendencies in Norwegian culture (1998). I do not have adequate studies available for the comparison of nature's influence on Chinese identities with that of Witoszek, but likewise, nature representations are common in Chinese culture and the landscape has played an important role in Chinese art. This may lead one to conclude that natural imagery reflects human beliefs and emotions. Nature constructions are reflected in labour art and culture as well, expressing dreams, social identities, longings and belongings.

The Norwegian tradition is informed by the experience and imagery of nature, which continues to codify the ethical and political predispositions of the culture. It is a legacy with which people identify, which they personify and which personifies them. This in turn bears on the model of communication, on the national ethos, on literary genres on images of cultural heroes, national rituals, leisure and work patterns and even on the modalities of external relations. Witoszek asserts that nature and the interaction with nature has been the Norwegian fixation (2004).

Richard White argues that we need to re-examine the connections between work and nature, which he underlines are perhaps the most critical elements of our current environmental crisis. He points out widespread convictions: that the original human relation with nature was one of leisure and that the snake in the garden was the machine and he puts forward the notion that popular environmental writings tell an old Judaeo-Christian story: "Work is a fall from grace. In the beginning no one laboured. In the beginning, there was harmony and no human mark on the landscape". White argues that the environmentalists demonise modern machines. He states that environmentalists need to come to terms with modern work, warning against imaging nature as an escape, a paradise where we leave work behind and nature may turn out to look a lot like an organic Disneyland. White's hope is that if environmentalism could focus on work rather than on leisure, a whole series of fruitful new angles on the world might be possible (1996:174 -185).

### **Presentation of empirical findings about perceptions of nature**

The shop stewards, at least in principle, disagreed with or expressed ambivalence to the notion that nature was something to be conquered and tamed by man. They were strongly

against the hazardous exploration of nature and natural resources. However, none persisted in this when the questions became clear: "People are worth more than animals" (NM41), as one put it unambivalently, and another replied, "What's the alternative?" (NM46). Several expressed serious concerns about the way man had exploited nature; I have let the eldest one in the sample represent a majority view:

We do not have any choice if man is to have any life. Sustainable development has to be part of it; we cannot go back to the Stone Age. We must continue to develop, but in a more environmentally gentle way. (NF61)

Interviewees in both Shanghai and Oslo were anxious about how man has explored nature. However, they believed strongly in technological innovation and public regulation of further utilisation of nature and industrial production in the future.

Spectacular nature is everything in the landscape, yet only one Norwegian imagined living plants, birds and animals, even small ones, in it. To a Norwegian, nature is peaceful scenery without other people; only one Norwegian stated that man was part of nature. It is wild rivers, high mountains and deep fjords, like the picturesque representation of Western Norway, or a palm and long beaches at a charter tour destination. For the Chinese interviewees, nature is blue sky, white clouds, blue rivers and green grassland. I interpret association of nature with colour to be result of serious pollution and because those from Shanghai seldom actually see the blue sky and the blue rivers. Not least, it is fresh air since they do not breathe in fresh air in Shanghai. The Chinese notion of nature, the natural ideal, is peaceful scenery without human footprints; it is Mother Earth and Shangri La. However, the notion of nature provides a potential to change trade union practise in a more sustainable manner.

In relation to Richard White's standpoint about the connection between work and nature, my findings paradoxically show that shop stewards consider nature to be like an organic Disneyland and Shangri La. Nature is for leisure and is pure and untouched. This is likely to concur with the view of environmentalists. On the other hand, all stress that nature should be managed in a more sustainable manner. In contrast to the environmentalists White has in his mind, the shop stewards did not see modern work to be the enemy of nature, but were concerned about unsustainable development and utilisation of nature. That being said, they agreed that man is superior to nature, despite some disparities of view: "We have got increased knowledge. Therefore we want to conquer space, the moon and nature" and "In

other parts of the world people go to the moon. The stars didn't change," said one Chinese industrial worker (CM58). Another stressed that only the regulated use of nature is acceptable (CF55). There is seemingly a kind of duality in individual unionists' perceptions of nature: one place for work and the enjoyment of nature elsewhere. To the degree nature is a construct, it is reasonable to link it to Shangri La, the untouched nature for peace and quiet.

As already introduced in chapter 3, Ole Bruun considers that nature in a pure, material sense probably is understood and signified in terms comparable with the West (1995). This resembles with Poul Pedersen's concept *the global ideology of nature*, introduced in the same chapter, which means the strong worldwide inclination to associate nature with ecology and conservation and underlines the link to modernity rather than religion, (1995:269). This might explain why there are slight dissimilarities in the views among the shop stewards in Oslo and Shanghai. Unions have some common ideas and constitute part of a greater global movement due to the same social background, which partly inform the attitudes. On the other hand, perhaps ancient perceptions and contemporary mindsets melt into each other.

One might object that my findings signify that cultural traditions do not matter. It is my belief that cultural traditions form perceptions of nature, for example worldviews and ways of solving environmental problems. In China overpopulation has been the major challenge for decades and maybe this explains the inclination to utilise nature in ways that has not been on accord with the ecological system. Another phenomenon is the fact that 85 to 90 percent of China's more than one billion people live and work on only one-sixth of the area. The remaining land is mostly hills and mountains. Unlike for example the United States, only 15 to 20 percent of China's land area is cultivable and much of this land has been used intensively for centuries (Wang 2002:1). Another explanation is the fact that China has been ruled by centralised and authoritarian regimes, which for example made "Chairman Mao's war against nature" possible (Shapiro 2001). In authoritarian regimes the rulers' decision-making does not necessary resemble that of ordinary people. Chinese workers take risks in dangerous environments due to daily needs and not having alternatives. In Norway the willingness to prioritise jobs on the account of the environment, is due to local communities' prosperities and workers' job-security. Norway is a rich country with a small population. In addition, trade unions were more involved in environmental debates after the Brundtland Report was launched. The resemblances in my findings might also be attributed to the lack of depth in my findings as well. However, there is an increasing environmental awareness in China and this may form patterns that resemblance the global environmental debate more.

These findings first and foremost indicate that the concept of nature is cultural constructed: A lake is not only water and a mountain is not only a raised part of the Earth's surface. There were no tsunamis, earthquakes or hurricanes. The informants presented the bright side of nature and added values into it. Outdoors activities were important in both countries. Most went into the nature for the peace and quiet. This may resemble with nature being an escape from the constraints of civilisation and a search of freedom (Horigan 1988). Urban life seems to be highly gratified as long as one has access to greenery and the women would like to have a terraced or low-rise house or a villa with a garden and flowers, which explains that reshaped nature in urban constructions of greeneries are important substitutes of nature representations.

When I asked the Norwegian shop stewards about nature, some of them stressed their un-Norwegian habits by coming out with such statements as "I am not the type for cabins in the mountains" and "I am not a fanatical skiing enthusiast", all of which sounded more like excuses for not living up to the stereotypical Norwegian way of life. It also indicates that nature is an important part of cultural and social life – no matter whether one conforms with the stereotype or not.

Adopting the concept that perceptions of nature are culturally constructed, I assumed it might have been constructed in different ways in the two countries. However, I did not find significant differences in the shop stewards' perceptions of nature. The main distinction was that the Norwegians had best opportunity to explore nature. The correspondence in my findings, independent of nationality, age and gender, is partly due to the fact that nature is culturally constructed and seemingly constructed in the same ways. People add values to nature. One trade union value is that nature generates jobs. The informants agreed that the sustainable utilisation of nature was important, though most did not agree that man should conquer nature. If I had gone into greater depth in my questions, I would perhaps have found more distinct disparities, but I do not believe these would change the conclusion. However, the answers would probably be different if I had asked workers in communities dependent on energy-demanding industry. The informants are urban unionists and consider nature to be separated from the community, people's neighbourhoods and workplaces. No one in my study belongs to the group that conforms to Næssian deep ecology, but rather to the anthropocentric view.

Most probably, the nature perception has evolved into a more universal one after the Brundtland Report was launched. The importance of sustainable development seems to be taken for granted, but the responsibility is ostensibly transferred to somebody else. One

dilemma relates to a rather vague notion of the concept of sustainability. Therefore, the term has to be more strictly defined and it should be further conceptualised into trade union work.

Here, one important question must be addressed: what role does class play in shaping identity from nature imagery? As we have already seen, there are no distinct dissimilarities in my findings between the respondents from Oslo and Shanghai. The answer might lie in a common conception of class identity and working class consciousness. Workers often have similar social backgrounds and take part in the same industrial class experiences that inform their identities. Therefore industrial workers' opinion is likely to be fairly similar. In my findings, there was a minor tendency that educated workers in Shanghai were more disposed than their blue-collar counterparts to advocating the closure of factories. In Oslo, all were ambiguous about the same question, which one might argue derives from class solidarity. On the one hand, they were disposed to giving priority to environmental protection, at least in theory. On the other hand, their concerns about the social consequences indicated that the protection of workplaces was most important. This is reasonable as long as trade unionists are not only trade unionists or workers, but also members of a society and a neighbourhood, whose environments influence their identities as well. Workers enjoy the beauty of nature and outdoor recreation like everybody else. Therefore, union identities are confronted with duality. Basically, they want to show solidarity with both man and nature, but trade union obligations and the traditional notion of solidarity obliged them to give priority to man and work.

That being said, one might ask whether public sector unionists are disposed to prioritising the environment at the expense of workplaces, and whether they have less class-consciousness and less loyalty to their class? One might argue that the increasing heterogeneity among workers makes a difference. In that case, blue-collar workers might make their priorities on the basis of sectorial self-interest, which creates an environmental division among labourers. This is similar to what Byrkeland asserts is the case between different national union branches in LO (1999). Consequently, one might argue that environmental consciousness is stronger than class solidarity, which might explain why the public and private service sectors are more inclined towards the environmentalists. They do not depend directly on energy policy and do therefore not have any sectorial self-interest. However, LO has so far prioritised the sectors exposed to competition and energy demanding industry. One might say that class determine one's mind and values, and the working class realises there is a duality in the relationship between work and nature.

In conclusion, I found no significant disparities between the Chinese and the Norwegians in their perceptions of nature. This coherence might be interpreted through Pedersen's concept of *the global ideology of nature* (1995). In addition, the worldwide agreement on the Brundtland Report influences values and beliefs as well. The international aspect of trade unionism also constitutes an influential framework of beliefs, particularly relevant for the relationship between work and nature. The informants were urban trade unionists, so perhaps class and social background explain the similarities as well. Therefore, I believe, as implied in my findings, that traditional perceptions of nature dominated by place, religion and class are changing in terms of increasingly interactive influences and a more heterogeneous workforce.

### **Nature representation in labour culture**

Western understandings of nature have developed from the Romanticism with nature poets and painters displaying the picturesque beauties and aesthetics, and sensual enjoyment with the notion of nature of order and goodness. The Romanticism ideology of nature was close to the ideas of nature's intrinsic value today. Modernity and the industrial revolution most probably appeared to be a cultural and aesthetic clash to the Romanticists. To the labour movement, nature was more than a beauty; the earth was a source for material and spiritual freedom. The smokes from smokestack signified work and income and the school of social realism has been dominant in the labour movement art.

### **Banners and propaganda posters**

Trade union culture in terms of art, literature, poems and songs is permeated with various constructions of nature, and basically this is a universal phenomenon. Nature is frequently used as a symbol in banners and propaganda as well: from the green birch together with the waving red flag on 1<sup>st</sup> May celebrations to the shining sun on banners. In the following, some examples that display symbols of unions' constructions of nature will be presented. Symbols are further explored in chapter 7 about the culture of trade unions.

Banners and propaganda posters are frequently used in both countries. The basic centre of attention has been on industrialisation and prosperity. In Norway the torch symbolised the socialistic fight for freedom, and the rising, deliberating sun symbolised the new dawn of victory and socialism (Terjesen and Jensen 1990:13-14).

In recent years, LO has created posters in which sustainability was the content. A poster related to LO's 90-year anniversary in 1989, portrayed a little child and had the following text: Inherit a damaged earth? No. New times, new goals<sup>80</sup> (LO 1989). The symbolic message is solidarity with future generations. The front page of LO's 2001-2004 programme portrayed the globe sketching human activities. The English version has an even more powerful symbol, displaying the earth in the middle of a wheel. In my interpretation the drawing indicates that with LO at the helm, *Mother Earth* will do better. Also the pamphlet LO made for the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, had a strong message about the earth, displaying hands holding the globe (LO 2002c). This symbol is in accordance with the content of the programme, but as stated elsewhere, LO has insufficiently followed up its programme and environmental protection has only sporadically been used as a theme in union propaganda.

The Chinese revolutionary posters also visualised the future through pleased workers and the progress of industrialisation and economic development, while in the background, we see clean and beautiful landscapes and sceneries (Stefan Landsberger's Collection<sup>81</sup>). Environmental pollution, to the degree it was acknowledged, has seemingly been ignored.

Although the negative environmental effects of industrialisation were not usually addressed in China, posters show that already in the 1970s, some attempts were made to create awareness about the necessity of making China green. A poster from the 1970s called for the collection of scrap metal and other waste materials for recycling purposes. The 1980s posters were more aware of environmental problems; the Government started a propaganda campaign that was to educate people in keeping their immediate surroundings clean. The emphasis on protecting the environment has over the years become an integral part of the various campaigns, with the aim being to build a Socialist Spiritual Civilisation (ibid).

## Union songs

Union songs display perceptions of nature as well. In the most prominent song, The Internationale, *Internasjonalen*<sup>82</sup>, the spring is used as a symbol of optimism, indicating people's victory for a new and better era in the Norwegian version (LO year unknown). The

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<sup>80</sup> In Norwegian *En ødelagt jord i arv? Nei. Nye tider, nye mål*

<sup>81</sup> Online

<sup>82</sup> The refrain has been translated like this: "Så samles vi på valen, seiren vet vi at vi får, og Internasjonalen skal få sin folkevår" in *Hev stemmen, a songbook from LO*). Translated into Norwegian by Olav Kringen.



sun is used in *Arbeidsmannen*<sup>83</sup> as well: Roughly translated: “Once dawn spreads its glory over the Nordic beach” (ibid.). This is also about the proletarian victory and the final message in the song is that when the slaves are free, the earth will be like a paradise.

The troubadour Stein Ove Berg composed the following song *Syng høyt kamerater*, which represented a newer tradition about class-consciousness and unity symbolised by the ability to plant seeds and cultivate trees (ibid.). As we have seen, nature has strongly symbolised workers’ dreams about a brighter future and a voice for freedom, justice, and unity.

Nature concepts are strongly present in Chinese songs as well; both before and after the songs were put in order by the Communist revolution. Based on title only due to my lack of Chinese language skills, a few examples are the *Great Road Song* and *Four Seasons* from before the revolution, and *Why Roses Red* and *Butterfly Spring*. In the Mao era, songs were re-written for state propaganda and the labour song tradition declined. However, Chairman Mao’s version of *The East is Red*: “The Communist Party is like the sun, Bringing light wherever it shines” is also an example of Chinese nature representation in songs, though in retrospect it is perhaps more devoted to the Mao cult than workers’ aspirations. This song became symbolic of the revolution and Chairman Mao himself was the sun that never set. Anyway, Chinese revolutionary songs were inspired by the former Soviet Union and Western ideas and most probably had the same content as that of the translated Norwegian, referred to above.

The characteristic feature of trade unions’ symbols and songs are representations of nature symbolising freedom and dreams about a better tomorrow. This is in line with Witoszek that argues nature influences identities (1998). However, in my examples natural imagery reflects class identities, dreams and beliefs. But it is also immensely important that nature gives the freedom in terms of work and income, which maybe confirm that the working class traditionally also saw nature as a set of raw materials out of which to wrestle a living, distinct from the upper classes to which nature has been a source of wealth and amusement (Coates 1998). However, the unionists also consider nature to be an important place for outdoor activities and the peace and quiet; maybe it reveals an escape from the constraints in the everyday life (Horigan 1988).

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<sup>83</sup> In Norwegian, “*Snart morgenrøden spredde sin glans over nordens strand*” (ibid). Translated into Norwegian by Johann Most.

### **Photos in trade union magazines**

The collection of trade union magazines examined offers negligible space for signs and symbols. The pictures displayed in *LO-Aktuelt* had no relevance to nature (*LO-Aktuelt* 2003, No. 10, *LO-Aktuelt* 2004, No. 5, *LO-Aktuelt* 2004, No. 14). In contrast, *Chinese Trade Unions* used many photos of natural settings (*Chinese Trade Unions* 2003, No. 2, *Chinese Trade Unions* 2004, No. 1, *Chinese Trade Unions* 2004, No. 3). Photos of nature and ancient heritages were dominant in the magazines. It is notable that the back cover of the three Chinese editions examined portrayed nature and cultural heritages. One front cover portrays road workers in a charming sunset (*Chinese Trade Unions* 2003, No. 2). Inside the magazine, one page is devoted to private photos. Most of those are spectacular, but cultivated sceneries. This could be interpreted as indicating that nature is considered to be cultivated, or that cultivated nature is what they usually have access to in urban areas. Perhaps the cultivated sceneries symbolise a vital supply of food since worries about food shortage are common in China. Cultural heritages might symbolise tradition and belonging in a climate of bulldozed houses and rapidly rebuilt skyscrapers.

The photos might also express a loss in their daily life, a search for identity and a longing for freedom. To the extent that it is a cultural construct, nature is a place you feel free and are free to do what you want. Nature is pure, with no lies and no falseness. In an atmosphere of demagogy and authoritarian propaganda with limited freedom of speech, people are forced to articulate their thoughts in symbols. In such circumstances, perhaps nature represents fairness in laws of nature, and the voice of the worker's heart.

The most interesting aspect of these observations is that nature and cultural heritages represent something important they want to share with union fellows. Nature symbolised victory and freedom to Western union pioneers, but perhaps workers' photos replace their voice for justice in China. That being said, I do not consider these forms of union communication to be agents for hidden counter-revolutionary efforts. If a political message is to be read into it, it would rather be the belief that a new world is possible. Or it is only about displaying beauty.

In a few words, one might say that ancient perceptions and contemporary mindsets melt into each other. Due to the accordance in my findings, it has been argued that class and similar social background influence workers' perceptions as well. Nature representation has been employed by unions in order to express freedom, justice, victory and unity, and the common dream about a better tomorrow. Additionally, nature has been the source for

workers' income, but also an escape from everyday constraints, searching the beauties as well as the peace and quiet.

## **Summary**

Man separated from, but controlling nature is a common attitude and behaviour in the Western world, while the Asian perception sees human beings as part of nature. However, there are similarities in traditional conceptions due both to the strong Norwegian interaction with nature and Askeladdian elements in the thoughts of deep ecology, and Confucianism and Taoism that reflect the necessity of balance in the universe, such as yin and yang.

It has been argued that class and similar social background influence workers' perceptions of nature. Union art and propaganda are permeated with various constructions of nature symbolising freedom, justice, victory and unity. The theme on banners and posters is mainly industrialisation and prosperity. In recent decades environmental protection has only been a sporadic theme in union propaganda.

There were no significant distinctions in perceptions of nature between the shop stewards in Oslo and in Shanghai, which might derive from a strong worldwide inclination to associate nature with ecology and conservation (Pedersen 1995). However, nature was referred to in such terms as an organic Disneyland and Shangri La, which illustrates that the construction of the relationship between man, work and nature is contradictory.

## 7. THE CULTURE OF SOLIDARITY

*A world to win*  
(Karl Marx)

Democracy, equality and solidarity have been basic pillars in the labour movement. In this chapter I provide an analysis of trade unions' values and practices. In order to do that, I have placed emphasis on culture with the solidarity approach. In the first part, I give attention to how the trade unions have symbolised their values from the pioneering period until the present day. In China such symbols had to yield ground to the Mao cult. The part of my study that contains trade union's representation of nature is reported in chapter 6.

### Union symbols and the Mao Cult

One approach to examine the culture of trade unions is to explore its use of symbols. Symbols express the *soul* of the organisation, which is commonly reinforced by rituals.

The manifestation of national and international solidarity as a basic value appears in labour ritual such as 1<sup>st</sup> of May, banners and posters. An important symbol is the red flag symbolising the blood from the pioneers felled away in struggles, those who carried the burdens in Tischner's terms, which I return to afterwards in this chapter (1984).

Banners and propaganda posters are frequently used in both countries. The most frequent used banner symbols in Norway have been symbols of solidarity and unity such as *Together we fight, Unity is our Strength*, symbols of fighting are accompanied by slogans like *Rise and fight! Onward to Victory! Do your Duty, Claim your Right!* These slogans were, as mentioned previously, accompanied with the torch as a symbol of the socialist fight for freedom, and the rising sun symbolising the new dawn of victory and socialism (Terjesen and Jensen 1990:13-14).

In China the ACFTU do not use traditional union symbols to any large degree anymore. Before the Communist Revolution the ACFTU marched against the Republican Government and they continued for a while during the Mao era celebrating the victory, but as one union official told me: "After the revolution it did not make sense to have demonstration on the Labour Day since we were in power"<sup>84</sup>. In the 2004 celebration the message was to value work and to encourage workers to be proud of their jobs (SMTUC 2004). The

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<sup>84</sup> An ACFTU official told me in Oslo, September 2005.

leadership probably stresses this message and moral duties due to the enormous labour shortcomings in China.

I also place political rhetoric in the category of symbols. The Chinese communicate the ideological phrase that the working class is the master of the country. This is inconsistent as long as the trade unions are subordinated to the party. If the union was the major base of recruitment to the party, it could be easier to believe there is a touch of reality in the phrase, but that is not the picture. The ACFTU is favoured with a few seats in Chinese political bodies. The phrase is nothing else than power language in order to hide or decorate the subordination. Some from LO's leadership are elected to the Labour Party's central committee. It does not make LO the masters of the country. However, their position provide some influence, particularly related to trade union concerns, but being master of the country is only rhetorical and mainly used in cartoons and tabloid media by LO's or the Labour Party's opponents.

Union songs are also important symbols and labour expressions. According to my informants, the Chinese do not follow this international trend anymore and use only but a few labour songs in addition to the national anthem. My informants were urban officials, if I had the opportunity to ask road and mine workers about union songs, the answer may be different. One front page in the union magazine displayed a picture called "A Song of Road Workers" and refers to a song about workers (Chinese Trade Unions 2003, No. 2).

The two most recognised labour songs are *The Internationale* (in English<sup>85</sup>, in Chinese<sup>86</sup>) and *Solidarity forever*<sup>87</sup> (download from the footnotes below). The songs are about international unity and expressed workers' dreams about a better world. They are in its pure sense about solidarity. In contrast, the Mao cult forced people to sing propaganda songs, like the Mao version of *The East is Red*: Chairman Mao loves the people. Chairman Mao, he is our guide. To build a new China, hu erh hai ya, He leads us forever forward<sup>88</sup>. One might argue that the cult of personalities represents a break with the collective orientation in the culture of trade unions.

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.koordinatoren.com/kultur/arbeiderdiktning/internasjonalen.html>

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.hymn.ru/internationale/index-en.html>

<sup>87</sup> <http://home.earthlink.net/~solidarity/index.html>

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.wellesley.edu/Polisci/wj/China/CRSongs/eastisread.html>

The most frequent used banner symbols in Norway have been symbols of solidarity and unity. After World War II, reconstruction, growth and wealth were the messages in the agitation posters (Terjesen and Jensen 1990:13-14).

Chinese posters<sup>89</sup> have played a supporting role in campaigns that were designed to mobilise the people. Important events have been *The Great Leap Forward* and *The Cultural Revolution*. In addition, the *Mao Cult* has been central. The posters frequently symbolised industrialisation and economic development (Stefan Landsberger's Collection<sup>90</sup>). The latter message has been typical for labour movement propaganda in Norway as well. The appeal is to support the Government's efforts to bring wealth to the workers.

This examination underlines the important themes in the culture of trade unions, which are solidarity, growth and wealth. In addition, it shows that the Mao cult and the totalitarian regime in China prevented the trade unions in communicating its own messages in symbolic ways.

### **The evolution of solidarity**

The concept of solidarity has evolved during history. The transition from a Marxist to a social democratic concept of solidarity has broadened in social theory to include not only workers, but also a range of other groups and issues: "The foundation is not seen as interests, but as ethics, humanism, empathy and compassion. The goal of solidarity is not socialism, but the creation of a feeling of community, social integration and sharing of risks." (Stjernø 2005:199). Stjernø emphasises that the goal has been reformulated in European social democratic parties from the original idea as a weapon in struggle to a more general feeling of community and the need for social integration across class borders. This renewed concept includes environmental issues as well (ibid. p. 201), and I would add that sustainable development, as referred to in a previous chapter, is relevant as a union solidarity project. In contrast to the Scandinavian countries, where the concept has been transformed and broadened, solidarity seems to be almost absent from the ACFTU vocabulary. However, the term unity is more commonly used. Neither Lenin nor Mao emphasised on the concept of solidarity, which may explain this absence.

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<sup>89</sup> Since I do not read Chinese, my material is limited to the Landsberger's collection.

<sup>90</sup> Online

According to Richard Hyman mechanical solidarity, which in Durkheim's terms constitutes uniformity based on *common identity*, is a model of solidarity that in the past played a significant role in the collectivism of labour movements. A second model of solidarity is based on awareness of *common interests*, which are best pursued collectively. Hyman argues that this is the classic rationale for trade unionism, seeing workers as victims of oppression and exploitation, individually weak, but gaining strength through unity (2002).

The labour force in China is becoming more heterogeneous as well, with migrant workers forming the main new group. In China, privatisation of SOEs and marketisation constitute the main picture. The gap between rich and poor is increasing fast, and subsequently workers may identify themselves in different ways<sup>91</sup>.

Hyman points out a third understanding of solidarity that involves *mutuality despite differences*, derived from Durkheim's organic solidarity. This model entails that there is an obligation on the strong to support the weak, an approach that may turn solidarity into a synonym for *charity*, implying pitying support for passive victims. Humanitarian aid, for example, is far removed from the socialist view of solidarity as active and collective.

Furthermore, Hyman divides solidarity into solidarity *with* and solidarity *against*. He argues that workers' unity was the basis for resistance to the oppressor (against), and contrasts this with solidarity as charity that often avoids conflicting interests and collective mobilisation and struggle (with) (ibid.). The concept of sustainable development could therefore be considered to be a solidarity project in terms of solidarity *with* the poor, the nature and future generations, and *against* capitalism and neo-liberalism in order to pursue a new world order.

Danish LO has put sustainability on the agenda in terms of a new way of thinking. Danish LO admits that the concept of sustainability challenges the dominant practice of solidarity and introduces a new notion of solidarity, *the surplus solidarity*, which entails sustainability as a new collective goal in the union movement (Hvid and Lund 2002). The concept of *the surplus solidarity* is maybe in contrast to another concept introduced by Józef Tischner, and discussed below, which says solidarity is to carry one another's burdens (1984).

Solidarity can be diffuse and it is not always obvious what it actually means. Perhaps the mechanical model is easier to understand since we have the distance to consider what it has been in labour history. In the following, two different ways of using the term today are displayed.

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<sup>91</sup> The wage gap is larger in communist China than in the capitalistic USA. Officials from the ACFTU are seriously concerned about the increasing gap between rich and poor, discussed in a meeting between the ACFTU and LO's *Faglig Kina-forum* 2006.08.01.

LO celebrated its centenary in 1999 and ACFTU 80 years in 2005. LO published a booklet in 2000 that summed up the most important events in its history. The first chapter is entitled *The Great Leap* and the final part is entitled *But the greatest is solidarity*. In this, one of LO's former presidents, Yngve Hågensen, stated that solidarity should be the driving force in the building of society (Bjørnsen 2000). This is close to Stjernø's evolutionary term. The Great Leap<sup>92</sup> characterises the evolution of Norwegian society through raised living standards and welfare, so it could seemingly be solidarity as a political idea that Hågensen had in his mind.

The article about the ACFTU is entitled *A Journey to Glory* and the article asserts *The past 80 years saw Chinese trade unions' march forward in solidarity*<sup>93</sup> (Chinese Trade Unions 2005 No.2). The ACFTU also uses solidarity as a means to reach its goals, but it is trickier to interpret what kind of solidarity it means. When the article asserts that solidarity has been a continuous process for 80 years, from the pre-revolutionary times through the brutal rule of Kuomintang and Chairman Mao's inhuman campaigns to the present day, it can hardly imply solidarity as a political idea. Therefore I believe it means unity, emphasising that the ACFTU has been united during the period. In my view, this latter example is closer to the mechanical model, based on common working class identities while China from the Revolution until recently has been a uniform society. It can of course be argued that the Chinese Revolution and socialism is basically a solidarity project. Yet one might then disqualify the Chinese system because freedom is a vital part of solidarity, which the Chinese do not enjoy. In both the examples union solidarity is seen as a *journey* that has not yet ended. Only the future will show how the ACFTU and Chinese society end up.

### **Solidarity as a mobilizing myth**

Richard Hyman introduces the concept of *imagined solidarities*, in which he gives three notions: i) worker or trade union solidarity today is imaginary, illusory, fictitious and unattainable, ii) solidarity is utopian, a Sorelian and unrealisable myth yet perhaps capable of inspiring action, and iii) the integration of diverse and competing/ conflicting employee

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<sup>92</sup> This is hardly distinguishable from Mao's catastrophic campaign "The Great Leap Forward", ending in great famine and the death of millions.

<sup>93</sup> The article is mainly a historically overview.



interests cannot be achieved mechanically, but requires creative imagination (1999)<sup>94</sup>. From the utopian approach he introduces the concept *solidarity as a mobilising myth*, which may include the previously example on LO 's struggle for improvements in the labour laws.

Hyman is not very concrete about how these interpretations differ. However, in order to conceptualise solidarity in terms of sustainability his approach is relevant to my purpose.

Matters of sustainability mobilise groups outside LO and the ACFTU. A solidarity movement has grown outside LO, in particular between aid-workers, environmental activists and anti-capitalism activists in North-South issues. In China the green NGOs are on the increase as well. These social movements have adopted the term solidarity and provided a new conception that rarely places emphasis on class or trade unions, yet still sympathises with exploited workers. These movements diverge from apolitical charities in that they, like union solidarity, are political by nature. The rationale behind such movements is the utopia of a better tomorrow. One might argue that unions not engaged in these new social movements might lose their grip on the traditional pride and conceptions of solidarity. In the long run, new generations grow up and have their own conceptions of solidarity, perhaps at odds with union conceptions. Words assuming new connotations are nothing new, as discussed in the latter section, but it is rather surprising that the unions are seemingly willing to let go a key conception without protest. Unions might be considered to be reactionary as long as they do not take the stage on environmental discussions. As one of the interviewees warned, if LO does not participate in such debates, others will define what the problem is and consequently LO will find its position as an opinion former in society weakened. The establishment of PULS was about this; unions organised in order to influence development and pursue environmental protection while taking care of industry in the Grorud Valley.

What is important is that sustainable development has the potential to be the new solidarity project in trade unions, like a mobilising myth or utopia that could inspire to action in the same way dreams about a better tomorrow have been during labour history. That is a major union challenge. Another challenge is to conceptualise sustainability in everyday union work. Therefore union education and training on sustainability is important.

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<sup>94</sup> I found this reference on the website Global Solidarity Dialogue, but originally the article "Imagined Solidarities: Can Trade Unions Resist Globalization" is printed in P.Leisink, (ed.) (1999): Globalization and Labour Relations.

## **Solidarity and sustainability**

Richard Hyman asserts that if solidarity is to survive, it must be re-invented and his major argument is the heterogeneity among workers (1999). Hvid and Lund criticise trade unions for not having any strategy for sustainable production, and for having supported companies and industries in maintaining the status quo when threatened by environmental demands. The authors emphasise that trade unions have neglected to promote their role as a social movement with a visionary project for societal change, and believe that the ideology should be renewed. They state that renewed identity as a social movement along with efforts to bring about societal change in the direction of sustainability will give legitimacy to trade unions as organisations that work for the good of the people (2002).

In the 2001-2004 programme, LO admit that many of the development features, such as sustainable development and the internationalised economy have put the trade union movement's values with regard to unity and solidarity to the test (LO 2001a). More precisely, I will add that sustainable development challenges trade unions' traditional notion of solidarity in terms of solidarity with both human beings and the environment. That represents a new notion of solidarity. To redefine the principle of solidarity is perhaps one of the greatest challenges to trade unions today. Hvid and Lund, and the Danish LO's project, provide ideas of a pro-active policy for sustainable workplaces. As far as I know there is not such initiative yet in Norwegian LO. On the other hand, according to the former Minister of Environment Thorbjørn Berntsen, trade union representatives, company management and local politicians together protested against environmental regulation in favour of a more moderate practice in order not to jeopardise jobs (Berntsen 1999). I assume the same alliances may occur in China. One might hope that alliances with the opposite aim of pursuing environmental issues will also come into existence.

The perceived contradictions between economic growth and sustainable development provide challenges to trade union policy in terms of a new mode of production and changing the patterns of mass consumption. It seems reasonable that wealthy employees bear their part of the burden of the miserable environmental state of the world. On the other hand it will be difficult, if at all possible, to compose an economic system for fair and just distribution that would be commonly supported. The Brundtland Report called for a new way of growth, not economic setbacks. The global economic order has intensely increased mass consumption and waste and it has to be handled as political matters internationally. Today's mass consumption derives from an incredible large amount of advertising and cheap labour in Asia and Latin America. On the other hand, economic development in poor countries in South depends on

purchasing power in North. In any case, the rapid economic growth represents an enormous environmental threat globally. These questions are of course more complicated than I have been able to discuss here, but my point have been to underline unions' views on the matter.

The illumination of trade union function indicates that social and economic issues matter. On the other hand, due to its ideology it is a union duty to be concerned about environmental protection as well. Despite the enormous problems that face the ACFTU, both unions could most likely take advantages from re-vitalising by emphasising on environmental protection. Several reports have documented that trade unions in various ways have orientated themselves to social movements and environmental coalitions and that this has been a successful revitalisation for the national trade unions in question (Berhens et al. 2002). After examining three European national movements Hyman recommends that many unions recapture the ideological initiative<sup>95</sup>. Taking the crisis of traditional trade unionism into account, he says these unions need new utopias in order to remain significant agents for social and economic mobilisation (1999:173). Due to that solidarity is union's backbone; environmental orientation should be a matter of ideological and moral duty. To cooperate with green NGOs and neighbourhood bodies could be beneficial, particularly for the ACFTU and might increase its legitimacy. To place emphasis on sustainability in the bilateral collaboration between LO and the ACFTU may revitalise both trade unions.

### **To carry one another's burdens**

The philosopher and theologian Józef Tischner introduced another approach from that of Hyman and Hvid and Lund in his work "Ethics of solidarity". Tischner's ethics concerned dignity and truth, but also ability and responsibility. According to Tischner solidarity is the willingness to carry one another's burdens and cannot be imposed from the outside by force. Tischner also stressed that solidarity is an idea, not a conception or a final theory. (1984:16-17). Such ideas derive from common identities and common goals based on the dream of freedom and equity.

Workers all over the world have been willing to lose their jobs, have been imprisoned and have even sacrificed their lives in order to unionise. That is what Tischner defines as being responsible and carrying one another's burden. Workers want freedom and democracy and to be able to have a decent work, income and a life with self-respect. Trade union

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<sup>95</sup> Great Britain, Germany and Italy.

solidarity is to support each other in order to achieve this. However, there is not one simple way of finding that kind of solidarity. Tischner also stressed that solidarity is an idea, not a conception or a final theory.

Demagogy and propaganda have been central in authoritarian communist regimes. The former *Solidarity* leader, Lech Walesa, points out in the epilogue of Tischner's book the desire to be free from lies and falseness. Not participating in the lies is an ordinary worker's simplest ethical choice, says Walesa (1984:139).

With relation to the Chinese situation, and as referred to previously, ideological and political rhetoric is overwhelming in the ACFTU's constitution. In the constitution the ACFTU introduces itself as "Socialist Trade Unions with Chinese Characteristics" and the important task is to pursue "socialism with Chinese Characteristics" (ACFTU 2005b). What this really means is unclear, and what ideological system it refers to can be questioned. Most probably this works mostly theoretically. Workers are not the masters of the country and they know it. The rhetoric on socialism and unionism with Chinese characteristics is perhaps perceived as falseness in Walesa's terms as well. The authorities' fear of organised uprising is probably due to the fear of being exposed, yet neither is the desire for democracy and freedom dominant in the proletarian opposition. This might be explained through the context of serious economic and social problems, or because democratic demands will be punished even more severely. However, it is noteworthy that the Director of the China Labour Bulletin (CLB)<sup>96</sup>, Han Dongfang realised that the personal cost - of arrest and long-term imprisonment - is simply too high for Chinese labour activists and their families to be willing or able to pay. He also warned the international labour movement not to demand this. Han Dongfang has recognised that the "underground organising" route is completely unviable, due to the fact that Chinese law criminalises and harshly suppresses any attempts at independent union organisation (2005<sup>97</sup>).

Tischner's fundamental approach to solidarity is that it cannot be forced. Therefore solidarity has to rise from below. That is what we see in labour unrests carried out in China today. At the same time as being forbidden, it constitutes influential power. The ACFTU has to balance on the edge of political realities. In fact, other bodies capable of replacing the ACFTU do not exist today. However, its efforts to improve working conditions and the

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<sup>96</sup> The Hong Kong based CLB was founded by the independent trade unionist Han Dongfang and promotes independent, democratic union organisation and the protection of labour rights and standards in Mainland China. Among other things it facilitates workers' collective actions and mobilises a network of labour activists in China.

<sup>97</sup> First published in *International Union Rights*, Volume 11 issue 4, 2004

request for industrial democracy are grounded in solidarity with workers, not forced by the state apparatus or local communist politicians that frequently obstruct such initiatives. It is not necessarily solidarity in Tischner's terms, but some demands might be. The ACFTU has to justify its existence as a trade union and deliver improvements to its members, and one cannot ignore that there are still perhaps forces struggling for freedom and democracy in the ACFTU. As already documented, the ACFTU representatives have fought for more autonomy on several occasions in history (Perry 2002, 1993, Chan 1993, Harper 1969). Nobody knows when the next attempt will be. The strongest public voices of these unionists carry the burden of others.

The CLB Director Han calls for the international labour movement to pursue union-to-union contacts over issues ranging from health and safety to workers' education and grassroots' organising work. Han stresses that talking to worker representatives from democratically elected grassroots branches would be a far more attractive and effective way of demonstrating international labour solidarity than talking to government-appointed officials at ACFTU headquarters (Han 2005). The Chinese are sensitive to any attempt by "hostile forces to Westernize and split our country" (ACFTU bulletin 2005), yet union-to-union collaboration at the local level in Norwegian companies in China, accommodates the recommendation from the CLB Director.

One may ask what burdens rich and wealthy unionists in North carry out? There are few real burdens to carry out from LO's side when it comes to solidarity with un-developed or authoritarian countries. It is likely to correspond with the Danish LO's notion of *surplus solidarity* (Hvid and Lund 2002). If LO chose to support underground unions in China, it would influence in a negative way on the Sino-Norwegian relationship, but LO will not be notably affected; yet the cooperation most probably would be stopped. In a country like China, underground unions and those who organise illegal actions carry burdens, not foreigners.

In contrast to Tischner, another aspect of union solidarity is what I will call the *Five stars solidarity*. Those are union bosses travelling around the world, tours in which union tourism is dominant, on expensive business class seats and accommodated in five stars hotels paid by the union<sup>98</sup>. It is reasonable that the rank and file discuss how union's human and economic capital is best employed, and even in China there is critique against the elites'

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<sup>98</sup> I believe this is not typical for trade unions, but happens to be the habit in too many international solidarity organisations.

travelling budget. It is also important to question what comes out of *the five stars solidarity*, particularly in light of Tischner's burden approach.

However, some may argue that the Chinese Revolution is a solidarity project, but the Chinese system disqualifies itself from that because freedom is a vital part of solidarity, which the Chinese do not enjoy.

Tischner's notion of solidarity is likely to be transferred into sustainability as well. In the wealthy North, sustainability challenges ordinary lifestyles. It is relevant for unions to question whether the economic growth should continue or whether trade unions should take the lead in order to pursue another kind of growth or less growth. Such initiatives may include burdens like demanding sustainable bargaining, reducing use of energy, and changing consumption patterns. The aim was written in LO's 2001-2004 programme of action, but has not yet influenced the policy-making in real terms. Related to Chinese circumstances, it is more difficult to identify what options the unions in fact have, but there is no doubt that the ACFTU have a potential to pursue sustainability, not only in economical and social terms, but environmental as well, which is the most fundamental dimension in sustainable development.

### **Solidarity with Chinese characteristics**

According to the 2001-2004 programme of action LO aims to contribute to democratic trade unions worldwide. LO attaches great importance to trade union empowerment and promoting local-level involvement in international trade union efforts for the common goal of a free and independent trade union movement capable of promoting workers' interests in all matters of relevance to workers. The overriding objective is to assist partners in their efforts to become self-reliant, independent, strong and efficient trade union organisations capable for meeting global challenges such as mass unemployment, class differences, poverty and repression (LO 2006, LO 2001a).

In China LO cooperates with the solely recognised union. Despite positive signs in conducting trade union work and efforts to represent workers in a dialogue with the authorities, it is still formally subordinated to the Communist party. Should not LO rather support those who fight for autonomous unions in China, those who protested at Tiananmen Square, those who advocate democracy, or workers participating in the thousands of other labour unrests nationwide?

What is important to consider is what is best for Chinese workers in the long run, and today nobody knows. It is impossible to argue in hypothetical ways. It is my conviction that

dialogue is preferable to isolation even the Communist Party controls the rules. In the long run Chinese workers might benefit from the cooperation, on the other hand, labour unrest may end in an uprising or rebellion that changes the political map in China. If so, some may argue that LO would have been on the wrong side. For years LO has supported oppressed and underground unions worldwide. The dilemma is that the Chinese leadership lays the premises that force LO to conduct union solidarity with Chinese characteristics, meaning LO has to work in circumstances where workers do not enjoy freedom of association<sup>99</sup>, which is hard to accept and difficult to communicate. On the other hand, LO has a history of cooperation with trade unions in authoritarian regimes, such as in the former Eastern Bloc. This explains why the cooperation with the ACFTU is accepted. The rationale is that workers will benefit from it in the long run.

As we have already seen, some scholars (Chan 1993, Perry 2002, Saich 1990 and Walder and Gong 1993) and not least, the Chinese regime itself, link the Tiananmen protest to the transition and the role of *Solidarity* in Poland. *Solidarity* succeeded in shaping an alternative trade union and was an essential part of the political breakthrough of democracy. *Solidarity* received sympathy and political and economic support from trade unions abroad, LO included. An important question is whether similar support and solidarity action to labour protests could strengthen democratic forces in China? The CLB actually runs a campaign with the slogan “It’s Our Union – and We Want it Back” (Han 2005). The purpose is to help Chinese workers to begin reclaiming the ACFTU from below and the CLB has taken several initiatives in this direction. They encourage Chinese workers to begin using the right accorded to them in the Trade Union Law and create trade unions through a process of democratic election, though registered with the ACFTU as the law requires. The key is to target factories and enterprises where the workers are already engaged in some form of struggle with the management. The CLB pays for criminal defence lawyers to represent workers in court. The main point is that the CLB considers that changes should be carried out inside the ACFTU by repossession of the union (ibid.). International trade unions’ involvement may complicate such processes.

Compared to the achievement of *Solidarity* in Poland, the situation seems to be more unattainable in China. The role of a strong Catholic church and dissidents that supported the Polish unionists explain some of the differences. So far, Chinese workers have not had the opportunity to organise influential unions. Nevertheless they constitute a threat. So long as the

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<sup>99</sup> This is one of ILO’s core conventions.

political elite is afraid of well-organised labour protests, the workers are defeated by force. The democratic movement is weak. Labour protests in China do not have the international media spotlight that Solidarity had. Grievances are commonly addressed to local politicians and enterprise managers. Another important explanation could be the fact that Chinese protests largely focus on economic and social problems such as payback and justice and rarely on human rights and democracy. Finally, it should be remembered that the workers were important, but not dominant, in the Tiananmen protest. Although the situations in Poland and China are not similar, it is noteworthy to recognise the role of the unions and the societal potential they may represent in authoritarian regimes.

## **Summary**

Democracy, equality and solidarity have been basic pillars in trade union activities from the beginning. Solidarity is basically defined as common interests that are best pursued collectively and have been the backbone in the culture of trade unions. Particular the symbolic agitation has strongly expressed solidarity in terms of unity. LO and the ACFTU define solidarity in different ways, which reflect the political environment in which the unions operate. As already stated, the hegemonic ideology and rhetoric in China states that the proletariat is the ruling class and the masters of the country. The latter results in that the Chinese unions do not strike, or make protests on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May because it do not make sense to protest against them selves.

However, the evolution of the concept of solidarity displays that it today contains both the promotion of workers' interests, and a principle for building a society. The term has evolved from originally being a weapon in struggle to a more general feeling of community and the need of social integration across class borders.

Today, the achievement in order to pursue sustainable development could be promoted in ways of being a mobilising myth or utopia, coincident with the traditionally class struggle for a better tomorrow. It has been argued that if solidarity is to survive it must be re-invented and that this may constitutes the greatest challenge for trade unions. Sustainability embodies strong solidarity perspectives and could be the new solidarity project in the trade unions. It is inconsistent if LO does not pays attention to the ecological balance since its analysis of the world situation stresses environmental issues. One of the reasons may lie in the lack of willingness to bear the burdens (Tischner 1984).



Matters of sustainability mobilise groups outside LO and the ACFTU that are engaged in environmental and social movements, pursuing the utopia of a better tomorrow. These groups have the initiatives in important debates and LO's position as an opinion former in society may weakening.

The cooperation between LO and the ACFTU have been discussed in light of the ethics of solidarity (ibid). It has been questioned whether LO should cooperate with the democratic forces in the trade union movement in China. Solidarity with Chinese characteristics has also been discussed due to the Chinese circumstances, in which the Communist Party sets the rules for how LO conducts its international cooperation vis-à-vis the ACFTU. LO's rationale is to contribute to democratic societies. What I have described as *the five stars solidarity* is criticised. The concept refers to union bosses travelling around the world on expensive flight seats, accommodated in five stars hotels, and trade union tourism constitute a greater part of the tour.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Development at what cost? Progress at whose expense?  
(Ramachandra Guha)

The major objective of my thesis has been to study how the cultures of trade unions affect their perceptions of sustainable development. In order to do so, I have brought into focus how trade unions deal with the issue and examined union representations of nature. The enquiry focused on shop stewards' opinions, beliefs and behaviour. In the cultural analysis, I have placed particular emphasis on the idea of solidarity. Due to the disparities between the two actors in my study, I have characterised the comparison asymmetric. For the same reason, I have placed emphasis on national contexts in which the unions operate, such as environmental history, and perceptions of nature. However, except from the parts that deal with the unions' ideology and how trade union work is conducted, I have searched for likeness. This has been an interesting exercise, due to the fact that there are a surprising number of points of resemblance.

### **The nature of trade unions**

Trade unions are primarily an economic agency engaged in collective bargaining. Core obligations are work creation, wages and the working environment. It is economic and social issues that matter. The overwhelming priority is to pursue employment. Job security and income is considered to be a basic living condition. Therefore, trade unions place emphasis on the welfare approach to sustainability.

There are significant differences in the world of work in the two countries, and this is reflected in the trade unions' activities. Basically, workers want a decent life, decent income and sound working conditions. The Chinese efforts to achieve decent living and working conditions are not distinct from the Norwegian efforts, but due to the circumstances, securing a basic livelihood is job number one in China. In Norway, employment is the most important aim. To a certain degree the aims are congruent because employment constitutes a major part of the ACFTU's work, but lack of back pay and a poor social security system have simultaneously to be prioritised as well.

In many respects the policies and efforts of LO and the ACFTU are not compatible, because one country is developed and the other is developing. One is a democracy and the other is totalitarian. One is an independent trade union, while the Communist party controls the other. Another distinction is that the Chinese regime has not yet recognised the conflict

between capital and labour, and the Chinese shop floor level has not been exposed to union activism. However, both trade unions have benefited from elements of corporatism in order to influence political decision-making.

LO operates in an atmosphere of autonomous unions, a genuine legal industrial framework and proper industrial institutions like collective bargaining and institutions for mediation. In China the ACFTU strives to adopt a labour market system in an atmosphere of democratic centralism and foreign ownership hostile to the set-up of unions, which provides Dickensian<sup>100</sup> working and living conditions. Bargaining, negotiation, tripartism, mediation institutions, and the role of legislation to safeguard workers' interests have been important means of the labour struggle in Norway. Such industrial institutions have recently been introduced in China as well as local union elections. One may argue that the ACFTU may attempt to adopt the social democratic way of conducting trade union work.

The ACFTU has been a subordinated transmission belt; meaning that state socialist trade unions are trade unions in name, and the function is to mobilize its members in support of state policies and to administer a large part of the social and welfare programs. It has been argued that the orthodox transmission belt theory does not justify the function of the ACFTU today because it has achieved more autonomy than intended, and is increasingly adapting Western industrial institutions. Therefore, I have argued that *transition union* is a more suitable description.

### **The ideal of sustainability**

The Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* underpins most contemporary environmental thinking and has informed my study. In short, the ideal of sustainability is defined to be a new concept of economic growth, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions, basically seen as a constructed bridge between environmental preservation and economic development. Additionally, sustainability is considered to be like an idea or principle direction of progress. Such approaches are relevant because of trade unions' strong solidarity objectives and because LO and the ACFTU intend to be political actors with an overall policy. However, the latter has limited space to act due to the totalitarian regime in China.

Sustainability relies on the relationship between humans, the environment and development. The World Commission endorsed the term as an idea designed to mobilise the

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<sup>100</sup> A symbolic comparison I found in the work of Anita Chan (1993).

forces of change for achieving a better balance between humans and nature, and thereby a safer and better world for all. In this regard, LO and the ACFTU do not yet constitute a mobilised force for change, which explains the essence of my thesis and how I try to understand why they are not.

My examination displays that LO and the ACFTU have paid greatest attention to economic and social dimensions and have placed less emphasis on environmental tasks. LO's environmental efforts are weak in terms of a sustainable industrial policy, particularly in terms of new growth and use of energy resources. The ACFTU asserts that they pursue a harmonious relationship between man, nature and scientific development, equivalent to sustainable development. However, such a view was difficult to identify in concrete terms.

LO's policy is basically in line with the recommendations in the Brundtland Report, but whether its policy on polluting gas-fired power plants is sustainable has been questioned, and its stated policy has not been satisfactorily followed up. LO asserts that domestic use of natural gas is better than imported coal and nuclear power. On the contrary, the acceptance of polluting gas-fired power plants is inconsistent with its overall policies. I explain this through the dominant position of energy-demanding industrial branches and an internal tacit peace pact in the organisation, which no opposition dares to disturb. It is inconsistent that LO does not emphasise national environmental issues when they stress environmental problems in their analysis of the world situation. If LO had placed more emphasis on alternative energy and generally been more engaged in environmental matters, its policy might have been less controversial. Environmental sustainability relies on the core connection between the local environment and global issues, but local solutions have to be environmentally friendly, which LO's energy policy currently is not. LO has not yet accepted the necessity to act in sustainable ways and leans on the absence of international solutions. Seemingly, there is no noticeable opposition when LO ignores environmental concerns. A more pro-active stance has been called for.

The ACFTU promotes social and economic matters in terms of basic living conditions. As one of my informants said, food is the first thing for poor people in China. This necessarily led me to consider sustainability relatively. Due to the state of working conditions in China, it is understandable that the ACFTU does not give priority to environmental matters. Even the ACFTU has the opportunity to demand environmental sustainability, but has so far ignored it in real terms. The authorities have seemingly not included the union movement in the implementation of sustainability despite it is a central part of the government's policy. Environmentalism is an area where a relatively open public debate is possible in China, and

green NGOs are mushrooming. If the ACFTU does not enter the field of environmentally conscious policies, a growing conflict between the environment and trade union movements will perhaps appear, which may follow the same pathway of conflicts that has haunted Western countries.

Agenda 21 intended to engage unions because they were considered to be vital actors in facilitating sustainable development. This has not been successfully followed up. None of the informants knew for sure what Agenda 21 or the Rio Conference was. In my findings the merger between environmental preservation and economic growth is difficult to identify. The overall picture of LO and the ACFTU does not provide an environmentally friendly image.

One common mind-set is that LO, the ACFTU, and the individual respondents strongly believed in technological improvements and demanded that governments should do more to promote environmentally friendly industrial production. However, such a view could easily be used as an excuse for doing nothing, which is close to the realities in my findings.

The examination uncovered positive attitudes among shop stewards to raising sustainability on the union agenda: they believed that LO and the ACFTU should be more active on sustainable matters. The shop stewards were positive to whether sustainable production should be part of collective bargaining as well. The behaviour was fairly environmentally friendly, but one striking finding is that environmental consciousness is not turned into trade union work, which might be understood to mean that they do not want to oppose the industrial hegemonic power inside LO or the Chinese authorities.

### **How to conceptualise sustainability**

The challenge is to conceptualise the workers' needs into sustainable practices. The Norwegian welfare state was built in times before sustainability was commonly called for, but today we have the knowledge, and the need for sustainable development is virtually incontestable. Vagueness and ambiguity of the concept of sustainable development is perhaps a problem, but the working class and trade unions have managed to concretise vague ideas, dreams and aspirations in the past, and it is my belief that they have the potential to do so again. On the other hand, it is necessary to define the concept of sustainability more strictly and conceptualise it into trade union work, and here unions must take this responsibility and follow up intended policy.

The informants supported sustainable demands in principle, but did not take the responsibility or initiatives in order to realise it. The enquiry demonstrates that if workplaces

are threatened, shop stewards are willing to give up environmental concerns. To give priority to job security derives from the traditional conception of solidarity, and such a notion might paralyse trade unions' efforts to become more sustainable. On the other hand, many industrial workers have already lost their jobs for economic reasons and profit demands rather than environmental causes, even though it is not easy to distinguish those aspects from one another. The problem from an environmental viewpoint is that economic and social arguments seem to be stronger and more acceptable than environmental consequences, though profit demands may represent a stronger threat to workers' job security than environmental protection. The reasons behind such a view lie in labour culture, which sees nature as a source for generating jobs, and underlines that culture is a conservative force that is difficult to change.

On the other hand, LO and the ACFTU communicate little of their present work in terms of sustainability. Improvements in working conditions are dominant themes in both countries. Workers' pay, working conditions, labour protection, social security and housing are matters of sustainability, and in particular for those who have the poorest living and working conditions in China. However, pursuing improvements for workers is not presented as part of a sustainable strategy, and neither is LO's solidarity work, which aims to build strong and influential unions as counterparts to economic and political systems that exploit workers. In my view, this empowerment of trade unions in the South contributes to more economic and social sustainability that can help to overcome the North-South disparities. In other words, LO combats international capitalism indirectly through its solidarity work. The ACFTU promotes international solidarity and justice as well, but sees itself mainly as a receiver of union solidarity because of the severe situation in China.

What is interesting is that there is a fit between stated policies and what is communicated in the magazines and in the findings from the interviews in the concerns about working conditions. When I include LO's and the ACFTU's efforts on improving the working environment in my definition of sustainability, it may seem like I am doing what Hvid and Lund warn against – that the concept of sustainable work can be misused as a *re-labelling* of already known and institutionalised activities (2002). This is not my point, but one must be aware of the pitfalls. Some improvements of the working environment, such as the concept of Inclusive Workplace (IW) and combating brutalised working conditions, represent new ideas, as the concept of sustainability calls for. Nevertheless, I welcome new sustainable perspectives in more of trade unions' day-to-day work.

The elite, the politicians, scientists and the environmental movement promptly adopted the concept of sustainable development. It has crossed my mind that the concept is too vague and ambiguous, and perhaps alien to common people and trade unionists. Trade unions deal with concrete tasks and day-to-day problems. They do not conduct their work in academic concepts. It is perhaps too demanding to conceptualise sustainable perspectives in day-to-day union work, and therefore they need new skills and assistance in order to do so. If the trade union movement is to become more involved in sustainable practices, the bottom-up approach will be important as well. It has to be carried out at the grassroots level, among those who are used to identifying and solving problems. That being said, union leadership should also dedicate prestige and goodwill to the topic because it is complicated and requires competence and skills from various disciplines. Unions should make more efforts towards initiating discussions on solidarity in a sustainable perspective: What it is meant to be and what consequences sustainability may have for union work if, for example, a conflict between work and environmental protection comes up. In particular, they should attempt to address the problem of environmental concerns jeopardizing the job security of union members. Workers join unions for practical and ideological reasons and aim to benefit from their achievements. This motivation sets the agenda in trade union work, and the shop stewards have to follow up members' aspirations. Therefore, local representatives perhaps favour politics that benefit their re-election chances. This must be addressed in trade union discussions. Another topic for such a discussion could be that environmental protection and management have the potential to generate new environmentally friendly industries.

### **Growth and wealth**

Securing a basic livelihood seems to be of most importance for the Chinese, and brutalised working conditions have the same importance for the Norwegians. This must be interpreted in the light of rapid economic globalisation. The introduction of a market economy in China has lifted millions out of poverty, but the extensive industrial and economical restructuring still affects a considerable amount of workers and has worsened their livelihood. The dissolution of the more traditional welfare system at the workplace, the *Danwei* system, has not yet been replaced by any sound social security system in China. Any attempt to improve the situation for marginalized people must be considered in terms of sustainability insofar as it concerns people suffering from not having a secure livelihood. In contrast, the Norwegian welfare

system includes all citizens and provides minimum support, but achievements are under pressure here as well.

In other words, LO is defending the welfare system from being weakened and the ACFTU is trying to create a new welfare system. The neo-liberal ideology that haunted the Western world after the downfall of the Eastern Bloc entailed economic globalisation in terms of reconstruction of the world of work, placing emphasis on fierce competition, efficiency and increased profit demands. The Norwegian welfare system came under pressure through increased privatisation and marketisation, greater profit demands, and more brutalised working conditions. The unions have combated these changes, and to a certain degree they have succeeded. In the same process of globalisation, China has become the world's factory gate. In the fiercely competitive world of globalised trade, politicians and private contractors manoeuvre on the edge of the environment and workers health to attract new investments. It is a common view that economic development in China derives from low wages and hazardous working conditions. Some workers pay the price for the economic boom with increased social insecurity and unemployment, while others benefit from it in terms of increased standards of living. However, the increasing gap between rich and poor concerns the ACFTU.

To a certain degree, the ACFTU's experiences today are similar to those of LO in the past, with focus on industrialisation and productivity. I interpret its efforts to achieve economic growth to be grounded in the same dreams and visions for the future that motivated LO to pursue increased productivity in order to achieve economic returns. Growth is the tool to achieve a decent life for workers; it has lifted the poor out of poverty and secured jobs and income. Ideally, sustainable development should have the same standing as the classical trade union rationale. However, unions have not captured the new challenges, perhaps due to a culture and a mind-set that are hard to change.

### **Trade union culture and constructs of nature**

Based on the notion that nature is constructed, man adds values to nature and the physical environment. Union culture in terms of art, literature, poems and songs is permeated with various constructs of nature and the unions' use of nature representation is basically universal. For the labour movement, nature was more than beauty: the earth was a source for material and spiritual freedom and nature provided freedom in terms of work and income. Trade union representations of nature have symbolised class-consciousness, freedom, justice and the proletarian victory.



Nature is used as a symbol in banners and propaganda; from the green birch together with the waving red flag on 1<sup>st</sup> May celebrations to the shining sun on banners. The torch symbolised the socialistic fight for freedom, and the rising, deliberating sun symbolised the new dawn of victory and socialism. The themes on banners and posters are mainly about growth and wealth, and environmental pollution, to the degree it was acknowledged, has seemingly been ignored. The smoke from the chimneys signified work and income. However, to the interviewed shop stewards, nature is also considered to be an important place for outdoor activities and peace and quiet.

In the Norwegian version of the most prominent labour movement song, *The Internationale*, the spring is used as a symbol of optimism, indicating the people's victory for a new and better era. In *Arbeidsmannen* the final message is that when the slaves are free, the earth will be like paradise. In Chairman Mao's version of *The East is Red* the Chairman himself was the sun that never set. However, Chinese revolutionary songs were inspired by the former Soviet Union and Western ideas, and most probably had the same content.

Nature concepts are strongly present in Chinese songs as well; both before and after the songs were put in order by the Communist revolution. In the Mao era, songs were re-written for state propaganda. However, Chairman Mao's version of *The East is Red*: "The Communist Party is like the sun, Bringing light wherever it shines" is also an example of Chinese nature representation in songs, though in retrospect it is perhaps more devoted to the Mao cult than workers' aspirations. Anyway, Chinese revolutionary songs were inspired by the former Soviet Union and Western ideas and most probably had the same content as that of the translated Norwegian, referred to above.

I found no significant disparities between the Chinese and the Norwegians in their perceptions of nature. This coherence might be interpreted in Poul Pedersen's concept of *the global ideology of nature*, which means the strong worldwide inclination to associate nature with ecology and conservation (1995). Basically, one may assert that ancient perceptions of nature and contemporary mindsets melt into each other.

### **The culture of solidarity**

In a cultural analysis of trade unions one must highlight the trade unions' perceptions, worldviews and major concerns. The culture of trade unions is a whole way of life; the basic collective idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought, and intentions that proceed from this (Williams 1963). The reason for trade unions' environmental non-compliance is

perhaps to be found in a culture that has traditionally considered nature to be a source of job creation and a symbol of workers' dreams about a brighter future. Industrialisation, growth and prosperity have been vital aims in order to achieve a decent life, and this has been achieved through solidarity and unity. Solidarity is therefore intimately associated with economic growth.

Democracy, equality and solidarity have been basic pillars in the labour movement. Unity for a basic livelihood, freedom from oppression, equal rights and human dignity has been basic union ideals and the rationale behind class solidarity. I consider solidarity to be the backbone of trade unionism. However, the goals of solidarity have been reformulated in European social democratic parties from the original idea as a weapon in struggle to a broad concept for social integration across class borders, which include environmental policies as well. To the degree that LO follows its political twin, the Labour Party, and its own stated policy, sustainability has the potential to be a new solidarity project, like a mobilising myth or utopia, that could inspire to action in the same way dreams about a better tomorrow have done during labour history. The Chinese does not commonly use the term solidarity. The ACFTU should also get more involved in sustainable matters in China as well, not least as an answer to the revolutionary shortcomings, with the increasing gap between the rich and the poor, and the state of the environment that threatens nature as a source of livelihood and in many cases jeopardises peoples lives.

Tischner argues about the ethics of solidarity and contends that solidarity is the willingness to carry one another's burdens. LO and the ACFTU are ostensibly not in such a position when it comes to environmental issues. With relation to the ACFTU, I have underlined that it does not have the space to act freely, though I do not consider that to be the real explanation for why it is not engaged in environmental concerns. On the other hand, LO is in a position to carry solidarity burdens, but not in the manner of the *five star solidarity* whereby union bosses and elites travel around the world on expensive business class seats and are accommodated in five star hotels paid for by the union or the Government support fund. Such activities are conveyed by the concept *surplus solidarity*, introduced by Danish LO. Aiming for sustainability, and bridging environmental preservation and economic development require burdens in Tischner's terms. The willingness to carry these burdens is difficult to identify in unions' priorities. Nonetheless, the shop stewards I interviewed were willing to do more than the union confederations. Sustainability demands solidarity that challenges the ordinary lifestyle in the wealthy North. Trade unions have so far been

unwilling to bear the burden in order to change consumption patterns or the mode of production.

### **If union solidarity is to survive**

If solidarity is to survive, it must be re-invented. Trade unions have been criticised for not having any strategy for sustainable protection and for having supported companies and industries in maintaining the status quo when threatened by environmental demands. Trade unions have neglected to promote their role as a social movement with a visionary project for social change, and believe the ideology should be renewed. It has been argued that this will give increased legitimacy to trade unions as organisations that work for the good of the people. Sustainable development challenges trade union solidarity and values. To redefine the principle of solidarity in ways of sustainability is perhaps one of the greatest challenges for trade unions today. The major dilemma is how to cope with environmental demands in proactive ways. In light of union ideology, it is a union duty to be concerned about this.

Today we see matters of sustainability mobilise groups outside LO and the ACFTU, particularly among young people. In Norway, a solidarity movement has grown between aid workers, environmental activists and anti-capitalism activists in North-South issues. These social movements have adopted the term solidarity and provided a new conception that rarely places emphasis on class or trade union solidarity. The rationale behind these movements is the utopia of a better tomorrow, similar to the dreams the labour movement has had. One might argue that unions not engaged in these new social movements might lose their grip of important union aspects of the conception of solidarity. It is rather surprising that unions are seemingly willing to let a key conception go without protest. One might argue that unions are not willing to carry the burden of solidarity when this relates to solidarity with both man and nature, and future generations. LO's reactionary stance might weaken its position as an opinion former in society as well as its legitimacy, and thereby diminish its ability to set the agenda, define problems and suggest solutions. LO's counterpart, NHO, is seemingly more engaged than LO, which might strengthen its legitimacy as an opinion former.

It has been argued that the worldwide agreement on the Brundtland Report and the international feature of trade unionism informs values and beliefs globally as well. Class and social background also explain the similarities. However, class perspectives evolve due to more heterogeneity among workers and it is only a matter of time before LO's policy changes

in favour of environmentalism. It is my belief that sooner or later the Chinese authorities will admit that they need trade unions as co-partners in order to pursue environmental protection.

If the working class is to end up in *The Garden of Eden*, trade unions should be deeply concerned about the state of the globe. They should use its resources proactively and sustainably in order to achieve a better tomorrow for the poor and future generations. Trade unions should play an important part in promoting sustainable development. If not, workers will remain victims of economic and environmental hazards. First and foremost, trade unions must be willing to bear the burdens of solidarity in order to solve today's most important environmental challenges. Trade unions must be aware of their solidarity duties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; further initiatives lie in their hands.

Trade unions have the potential to become the powerful forces of societal change that sustainable development depends on. Today, we see that other solidarity movements have taken the initiative and often define solidarity in ways that do not necessarily include trade union perspectives. Despite this, it is my belief that trade union solidarity is under an obligation to encompass more responsibility for sustainable development and I remain optimistic in my consideration of the capability of trade unions to pursue sustainable development.

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## **APPENDIX A SUPPLEMENTARY METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **About the interviews**

I carried out the greater part of my fieldwork in Shanghai during my study at Fudan University in October and December 2004. I was told that the Chinese used to be sceptical to research and interviews. Therefore I found it necessary to focus on creating an atmosphere of mutual trust from the outset.

Experts had told me that it might be easier to use people from inside the ACFTU than foreigners. To make contact with Chinese trade unionists inside the legal system, it was necessary to ask English speaking Zhang Guo Feng and Lui Rui from SMTUC's international office, to organise the interviews and interpret for me. In 2004 I met Zhang on two occasions: when I visited SMTUC in June and during his visit to Norway in September. I took these opportunities to introduce my project to him even though it was not satisfactorily detailed at that time. Before I went back to Shanghai in October, I sent a formal letter to SMTUC's international department asking for assistance during my fieldwork among trade unionists in Shanghai. The international office receives about 150 international delegations a year, so I was aware that would be busy time. Zhang interpreted all meetings arranged by him and I was very satisfied with his arrangements and interpretation. He has an incredible network and capability to arrange meetings with key individuals; in one way he was one of "them" from the trade union, and he played a constructive role in breaking down the scepticism many had to being interviewed. The internal interpreters and other officials guided me in a culture and a part of society I didn't know too much about in advance.

I supplemented the background information I had with other informal channels, such as scholars and students from Fudan University and Shanghai Trade Union School, officials working for provincial and district environmental authorities, and the Norwegian General Consulate in Shanghai.

The interview guide contained the broad features of topics to be covered as well as additional and follow up questions and was a useful tool in being able to structure the interviews and maintain focus. The questions were formed in such a way as to be appropriate in both cities. Before starting my fieldwork I submitted the questions to several people, trade unionists, academics and others - from whom I was given helpful advice.

Some of my questions reflected this advice. For example, one question that related to the Chinese situation in particular concerned whether or not they bought or hunted rare

species, and was based on the fact that some people eat protected species or use them for medical purposes. Moreover, in relation to the informants' background, I very quickly realised that asking about the size of family in Shanghai was actually not that interesting. Because of the one-child-policy, the limit is three.

The interpreters were provided with the interview guide and a short written presentation of my project to prepare for the interpretation. The interviews with the key informants, such as boards members and policy-makers in the ACFTU, green NGOs and environmental authorities, were conducted as informal face-to-face interviews and on some occasions as groups. Some of these interviews were performed in English without any interpreter. The informants were very briefly introduced to the project at the beginning of the interviews and were also informed that they would be completely anonymous.

People familiar to Chinese culture told me the Chinese lay great emphasis on personal positions. From other research projects I noted that business cards could be important, and it was therefore beneficial for me to be able to use the name of the respectable Fudan University.

Taking advice from Sino scholars, my interview techniques varied in accordance with the different groups of informants, though I aimed at establishing a friendly dialog in all settings, yet using the interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. In Shanghai the interviews lasted from two hours with one worker to two hours with six people.

In some situations I was prepared not to take notes at all. I was also prepared to meet my informants several times to achieve trust and credibility, and to create an atmosphere in which the informants would tell me their story. In practise, this proved unnecessary. I was also afraid it would be a challenge to obtain real rather than ideal answers. Once again, this fear proved ungrounded, even though I was looking for their personal views and not political rhetoric.

Conducting the interviews in Oslo was, of course a much easier task because of the language. I used the snowballing method by asking trade unionist I knew. My starting point was to gather a sample commensurate with that Shanghai with regard to sex, age, education and trade union branches; from both private and public sector, industry; service and administration. The branches, structure and major industries differ in Shanghai and Oslo, with the result that it was impossible to make the selection completely identical, but rather representative. I avoided interviewing people that were too familiar to me. All the interviews went smoothly and lasted from 45 minutes to two hours.

In contrast to those in China, all the Norwegian interviews were done on a one-to-one basis. This can create a problem in terms of time used to express one's views. On the other hand many of the informants knew me from trade union work, though I do not believe this influenced their answers in any way.

I prefer to refer to the group interviews conducted in Shanghai as entities since they more often resembled a conversation than a strict interview. Not all those involved answered every question. In my transcription of the semi-structured interviews I have structured them chronologically in accordance with the order of the interview guide. Where the informants used keywords and not complete sentences, I have transcribed sentences, acutely aware of the danger of colouring or expanding the intentions of my informants. My primary task was to make the answers understandable and reasonable. From other interviews I made notes.

### **About the written material**

The major part of LO's policy is set out in the Programme of Action for 2001-2004. This forms the only subject of my investigation of LO's stated policy. To examine how LO follows up its stated policy, I have scrutinised the annual reports for each of the prevailing four years. Due to the considerable amount of available sources, I did not examine collective agreements or reports from the different departments.

Initially, I must underline that the annual reports do not tell the reader much about what LO actually does in some matters, but report what kind of projects they are involved in, the nature of the projects, and by whom LO is represented in different kinds of committees and cooperation projects. Nonetheless my focal point will be whether or not action corresponds with stated policies in terms of major priorities and achievements.

Since I did not have access to similar documentation from the ACFTU, I examined the speech by the President of the ACFTU, Wang Zhaoguo, held at their congress in September 2003. This included their plans for 2003-2008 and a report for the previous five years. Additionally I have scrutinised a blue paper on safeguarding legitimate rights and interests, as well as a speech about the state of labour protection, made by Zhang Chengfu, Director of the ACFTU's Labour Protection Department. I believe these documents correspond to those I examined about LO. That being said, it may still be considered an inadequate collection for the reason that the ACFTU President's speech is from 2003, with the policy part looking forward and the report viewing the previous years. However, I do not consider this to be a problem because in all the material I have about the Chinese situation after the introduction of

a market economy, the workers and the ACFTU face the same problems, and I assume the examined material reflects this, even though the period of years dealt with does not fit exactly.



## APPENDIX B INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Registration

Number:

Date and time:

Place and environment:

Sex:

Age:

Size of family:

Work place/ enterprise:

Education:

Office:

### Questions for the interviews

#### **I      Everyday life and private household**

1.      How do you understand "the quality of life"? What is important for you to make this come true? And for your family and children?
2.      If you could choose, how would you like to live? Where, what kind of neighbourhood, surrounding environment, and type of house would you like to live in? (In the city centre, in suburbs, small house, or apartment building/block?)
3.      Independent of your economic situation, where would you prefer to spend your weekends/holidays?
4.      If you received information that your consumption habits harm the environment, would you be willing to change your behaviour? (Use of car, over-consumption of water and natural resources, buying too much useless things, waste instead of repairing.)
5.      If you have the opportunity, are you willing to buy or hunt on rare species? I.e. easting or using endangered animals for medical purposes? Even if they are preserved and your action causes pressure and extinction? (Traditional meat/food/medicine leg of special kind of frogs, bone from Tigers) Why?
6.      The Government can regulate taxes on highly pollutant products used by private households. Do you agree with the "polluter pays-principle"? Are you willing to pay higher tax to protect the environment? Why not?
7.      Sorting systems for garbage and recycling centres for waste disposal are introduced in many residence areas. Does it exist where you live? What kind? Do you participate? Why not?
8.      Do you participate in public debates and/or in decision-making regarding environmental protection?

9. Do you discuss the relationship or tension between environmental problems and economic (rapid) development with your family and friends/neighbours? What do you discuss?
10. Are you engaged in green NGOs? Why or why not? Which ones? How do you participate?
11. How can you contribute to improve the environment?

## **II Image of Nature**

1. What do you associate with beautiful/ spectacular nature?
2. How do you understand the concept of nature? Is nature important to you? What parts of nature are important to you?
3. The modernized world seems to rank man over nature, that nature is something to be conquered and tamed by man. Do you believe this is the right way to view and manage nature?
4. What kind of outdoors activities do you enjoy? Do you have access or opportunities to visit nature in the surrounding environment in your daily life? Where and in what way? Is this important to you? Why?

## **III About the environment**

1. What do you think are the most serious environmental problems today?  
In your city?  
Within your country?  
Globally?
2. Does information about the consequences of environmental destruction make you worry about the future? What kind of pollution? Are you afraid that you or your family can be, or already are, struck by environmental diseases?
3. What do you think about green events like "The Green Olympics" in the 2008-games in Beijing? How do you understand this statement? Do you think it is realistic?
4. How do you keep yourself up to date on environmental issues?
5. Do you think the Government does enough to protect the environment? Are you satisfied with their efforts and what they have achieved?
6. Have you changed your attitudes towards environmental protection in the last few years? Why? In what way?
7. Do you consider poverty reduction to be part of sustainable development?

8. Do you remember what happened in Chernobyl in 1986? What was your reaction? What do you know about the incidence? Do you know anything about the consequences? Were you worried? Are you worried it can happen again?
9. During the last decades several new words, expressions and concepts have developed, among them Agenda 21. Have you heard about Agenda 21(or the Rio-conference)?

#### **IV Work places and jobs**

1. Do you agree with closing down outdated and pollutant industrial plants? Even though people lose their jobs? Do you have any suggestions about how this should be managed?
2. How do you understand a green office or workplace?
3. How do you get to work?
4. What are the most pressing issues related to Occupational Health and Safety (labour protection)?
5. The content of collective bargaining differs from place to place and has changed over time. Do you think sustainable development in terms of sustainable production and practice can become a part of collective bargaining in the future?

#### **V Trade unionism**

1. Is your trade union involved in environmental matters and sustainable practices? Should they? In what way?
2. Do you discuss any topics regarding sustainable development and environmental protection at work with your colleagues? What topics?
3. Should trade unions get involved/engaged with the external environment? In what way? Important topics?
4. Lack of knowledge is often considered to be an obstacle to environmental behaviour. Do you think trade unions could contribute to change behaviour? In what way?
5. Who (NGOs and other organisations/ governmental bodies) could be potential alliances of LO in achieving sustainable development and environmental protection?
6. If the trade unions become more engaged in sustainable practices, do you think it would increase their esteem and reputation?
7. Do you think this would revitalize trade unionism?

8. Do you think environmental engagement would increase the recruitment to trade unions in general and of young workers in particular? Why?
9. Do you think trade unionism, with collective bargaining for higher salary and better working conditions on behalf of the workers as primary tasks, contributes to sustainable development? Why?

**Do you have any further comments or are there any questions you are missing?**

**New questions that arose during the interview:**

## **APPENDIX C LIST OF INTERVIEW**

### **Semi-structured interviews**

#### **Oslo**

- NM52 The Construction Workers Branch, region Oslo.  
NM46 Iron and metal workers branch in region Oslo and board member of LO in Oslo.  
NF49 The Norwegian union of municipal and general employees in region Oslo and board member of the LO in Oslo.  
NM41 The Norwegian union of municipal and general employees in region Oslo and board member of the LO in Oslo.  
NM40 The Central Administration of Civil Service Union.  
NM37 The Construction Workers Branch, region Oslo  
NM46b The Construction Workers Branch, shop floor.  
NF38 Wine and Spirit workers trade union in Arcus A/S, Oslo.  
NF61 Norwegian Union of Commercial and Office Employees, Regions East.  
NF35 Workplace branch of the Union of Graphical workers and member of the Committee of Education in the Oslo district union of Graphical workers.  
NF29 Norwegian Union of Commercial and Office Employees, Regions East

#### **Shanghai**

- CM28 General Motors  
Changning district labour unions, Tianshan neighbourhood, state owned companies and public administration:  
CM45 Telecommunication trade union.  
CF50 Neighbourhood trade union.  
CM55 Construction branch trade union.  
Bao Steel, state owned company:  
CF39 Steel Workers trade union.  
CM42 Steel Workers trade union.  
CF43 Steel Workers trade union.  
Putuo district trade union, state owned companies and public administration.  
CF39 Putuo District Trade union.  
CF47 Village union.  
CF49 Lamp factory trade union.  
CM54 Construction trade union.  
CM58 Plastic factory trade union.  
CM59 Economic Zone Administration.

### **Officials and other respondents**

#### **Oslo**

- Ms. Diis Bøhn, LO  
Ms. Karin Beate Theodorsen, LO

Mr. Kjell Finvåg, LO in Oslo

Mr. Chen Wei, LO

### **Shanghai**

Ms. Wang Lan Jie, Vice-chairman, SMTUC.

Ms. Liu Rui, International Liaison Department, SMTUC.

Mr. Zhang Guo Feng, International Liaison Department, Deputy Director, SMTUC.

Mr. Bian Enjun, President of the trade union in Shanghai Baosteel Group Corp.

Mr. Wu Cheng Jian, Shanghai Environmental Protection Bureau, International Cooperation Division.

Mr. Odd Wibe, Norwegian General consular in Shanghai

Mr. Peng Bo, Ass. Professor, Fudan School of International Relations and Public Affairs.

## **APPENDIX D LIST OF EXAMINED WRITTEN MATERIAL**

### **LO**

LO's Programme of action 2001-2004, [www.lo.no](http://www.lo.no), printed edition (removed from the site)

Beretning 2001/ Annual Report

Beretning 2002/ Annual Report

Beretning 2003/ Annual Report

Beretning 2004/ Annual Report

LO-Aktuelt, No.10-2003

LO-Aktuelt, No. 5-2004

LO-Aktuelt, No.14-2004

### **The ACFTU**

Wang, Zhaoguo, President of ACFTU, report at the 14<sup>th</sup> National Congress of Chinese Trade Unions, 03.09. 22.

Report (2005, July 10) [online]. –URL: <http://www.acftu.org.cn/report.htm>

Zhang, Chengfu, untitled speech from 2004 by Director of the Labour Protection Department in ACFTU about the state of labour protection, handed out, translated by Yvonne Hsu, Fudan University, Shanghai.

Blue paper on Chinese trade union's safeguarding of the legitimate rights and interests of workers and staff members (2002), ACFTU: Beijing.

Chinese Trade Unions, No. 2, June 2003, published by ACFTU: Beijing

Chinese Trade Unions, No. 1, March 2004, published by ACFTU: Beijing

Chinese Trade Unions, No. 3, September 2004, published by ACFTU: Beijing

## **APPENDIX E THE CITIES OF OSLO AND SHANGHAI**

Oslo is the capital of Norway with 510 000 inhabitants. The city is characterised by a mix of old and new architecture, parks, hills, lakes, forest and the fjord. It is 450 square kilometres in size, of which only one third is developed. Woods, lakes and 40 islands in the fjord surround the city centre. 360 000 people work in Oslo, with the main businesses being the shipping industry, offshore and engineering activities, information technology, telecommunication and multimedia, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals (Oslo Municipality's homepage 05.02.17).

Shanghai's population in terms of residents with permanent papers was close to 13.5 million in 2003, representing 1% of China's total population, but the basic long-term population was more than 17 million (2003). The total area of the city is 6.340 square kilometres representing 0.06 of China's total territory. The city employed more than 8 million people with key industries in the manufacturing of electronics and information products, automobiles, petrochemical and fine chemical processing, fine steel products manufacturing, production of complete plants and biomedicine. The majority of the Shanghai area is flat and belongs to the alluvial plain of the Yangtze River Delta. Dotted with many rivers and lakes, the water resources are rich and account for 11% of the city's total territory (Shanghai government's homepage 05.05.17).

Shanghai has undergone a historic transformation, in particular since the Chinese Government introduced market reform and economic development. Today Shanghai is the largest economic and transportation centre in China. The city strives to be one of the economic, financial, trade and transportation centres in the world.

It is noteworthy to mention that surveys were carried out in both cities in 2004 to gather basic information about residents' attitudes and well-being, with the results being largely positive (Oslo Municipality and Shanghai government's homepages).



## APPENDIX F AN CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE WORK

According to Hvid and Lund work is almost totally absent in the debate on sustainability and the development of sustainable forms of production (2002, *Arbeidsmiljøverkstedet* 2004<sup>101</sup>). Hvid and Lund's point of departure is that work is essential for sustainable development, due to work's active, creative and developing nature. They also state that work is the central factor for both welfare and poverty, for integration and exclusion, for sickness and well-being, as well as the source of by far the majority of all technological innovations. Hvid and Lund underline that social orientations and values related to work also have a great impact on the extent of consumerism, the use of the car, the well being of the family, and the time and resources available for participating in political and social activities. In the understanding of authority and self-consciousness as important elements in an individual's identity, they argue that work plays an important part in the shaping of identity. They also remind us that work has always affected and changed humans, their values, goals and social orientation.

Hvid and Lund's basic tenet is that human work activity is the core element in the relationship between man and nature, in the creation of man as a social being and in the creation of social relations and society. The classical concept of work, they point out, is built on the idea that free work is a fundamental and deeply rooted human need. They demonstrate that endeavours have been made to develop work so that workers become empowered, competent, value oriented and involved, but stress that this development has not been merged with the development of sustainability. Hvid and Lund warn against allowing the concept of sustainable work to be misused as a re-labelling of already known and institutionalised activities, and state that what is important is to find and emphasise what new perspectives and practices the concept of sustainability gives to occupational health and safety, socio-technical work systems, training and education, organisational development etc. Hvid and Lund suggest the following provisional definition of sustainable work:

Sustainable work is a conscious, goal oriented and corporate activity, which both involves the working persons and external stakeholders in the fulfilment of social and environmental needs for those who are working, the society they are a part of, and the natural environment. (Ibid. p.13).

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<sup>101</sup> Hand outs at a workshop on sustainable working life arranged by LO and AOF, May 2004 at Sørmarka.

According to the authors, this definition provides a certain perspective with which to look at other important phenomena in the fields of work and sustainability. Important elements here are regeneration and reproduction, participation and a holistic perspective in local work activities, because sustainability deals with the reproduction of nature and society, and not only the survival and growth of the individual company. Hvid and Lund state that, in spite of good intentions, the trade union movement has failed to develop a positive strategy as a base for their positions and participation in the debate on sustainable development.

A visionary, political trade union sustainability strategy must, according to Hvid and Lund, “link the development of a sustainable production to improvements in the everyday life of the employees by reintroducing the classical concept of work as point of departure for trade union work” (ibid). The emphasis must be firmly placed on work as a positive concept. The trade union movement’s perspective on sustainability has been and still is, closely connected to the issue of employment. The authors criticise this point of view that production is positive because it creates jobs - and believe it illustrates the lack of a product policy that reflects the organisation’s wish for an ideal product development. Such a product policy should not only reflect the sale of labour, but should also concern the products that the members are to produce. Hvid and Lund contend that this will contribute to reflecting more sides of the quality of the work in the trade union movement’s efforts.

The lack of a product policy is the Achilles’ heel of the declared sustainability policies of the trade union movement, the authors argue. Trade union movements should find a new foundation for and perspective on the foreseeing of the members’ interests as counterweight to the business-oriented version of sustainability, instead of letting themselves be exploited by other interested parties such as employers, authorities and environment organisations.

### **Lessons learned in the Danish project on sustainability**

Hvid and Lund worked on a pioneering project initiated by Danish LO in 2001 called *Towards the sustainable workplace (TSW)*. The Danish project was a joint project between 15 workplaces, educational institutions, trade unions, researchers and external consultants. The aim was to create development processes at the workplaces and between all the players so as to pave the way for more sustainable workplaces and greater workplace democracy (LO in Denmark 2004).

The reflection report from the project concludes that even sustainability involves social problems at a global level, thus making it good sense to apply the concept at workplace level. The notion of sustainability was expressed as a vision rather than a concrete goal, and

its components are both content and process oriented: ‘You must work with relevant themes and do so in a sustainable manner’ (ibid). Hvid and Lund also state that sustainability is largely a matter of having an eye for and an ability to handle dilemmas – an activity they experienced had negative consequences on others. Furthermore they learned that there are no right or wrong answers and actions, but that choices have to be made. Sustainability is a far-reaching concept that needs to be interpreted and translated to make sense at the workplace. Skills development and employee participation are important. However, working on sustainability causes conflicts, due to its broad themes, and often incorporates the broader views of the players as citizens. Hvid and Lund found sustainability a difficult, but rewarding concept. Nevertheless, the concept was ambivalent throughout the *TSW* project, and, as they point out, it probably still is. Some workplaces adopted the concept and imbued it with their own meaning, while others replaced the word sustainability with related words and concepts that were easier for their colleagues to recognise, such as social responsibility, inclusiveness and improved occupational health and safety. I believe these experiences demonstrate that people were uncertain about the meaning of the concept, something that should be borne in mind when conducting further work on sustainable projects at the grass-roots level.

### **Sustainability as a new concept of solidarity**

The core point in the concept of sustainability is the moral obligation one has to responsible and fair social, economic and environmental development. Sustainability is therefore by nature a collective goal that can only be achieved by fellowship (LO in Denmark 2004b:13). Danish LO points out that solidarity encompasses the principle of collective effort, but the concept of sustainability challenges the dominant practice. It describes the historical notion of solidarity as *survival solidarity*. Today a new notion of solidarity beyond the narrow role of employees is required. Resourceful trade unions are able to carry out what Danish LO describes as *surplus solidarity*. This kind of solidarity is directed towards outsiders - underprivileged strangers or societal needs – in the interest of the LO members as fellow citizens, and not solely in the interest of being an employee. This new perspective includes individual attitudes and choices as well as a more comprehensive view of common interests. The development of a profile of social movement achieving sustainability may pave the way for opportunities to built coalitions with other social movements. This, Danish LO believes, may provide access to networks and resources that in the long run can strengthen the trade union movement. However this first presupposes a broader trade union agenda and fulfilment of new interests.

**ENCLOSURE (AVAILABLE)**

**A Transcription of interviews**

**B Findings from written material**